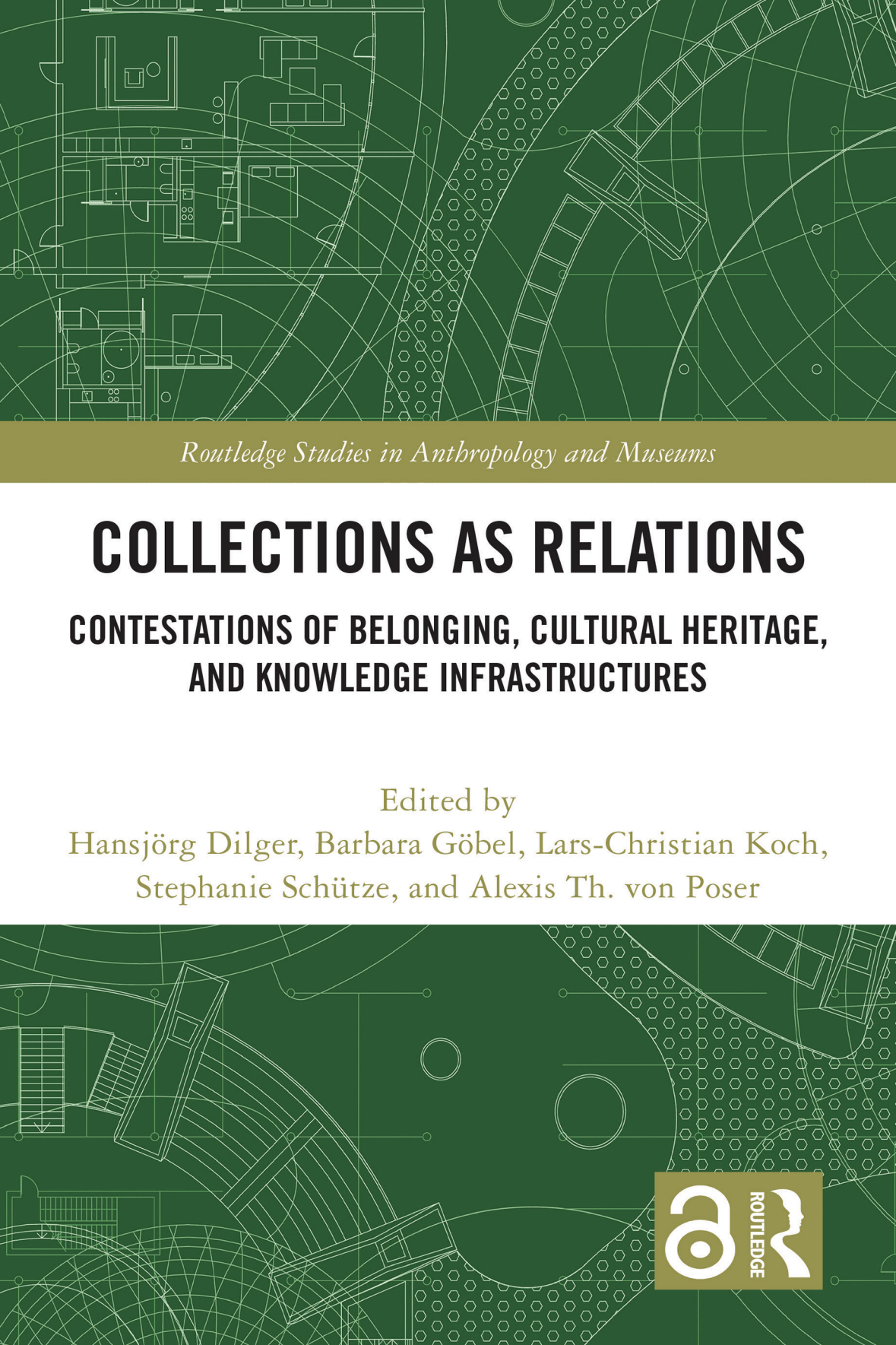


The background of the cover is a complex, abstract line drawing in a light green color on a dark green background. It features various geometric shapes, including rectangles, circles, and arcs, some of which are filled with patterns like hexagons or dots. The lines are thin and delicate, creating a sense of architectural or technical drawing.

Routledge Studies in Anthropology and Museums

COLLECTIONS AS RELATIONS

CONTESTATIONS OF BELONGING, CULTURAL HERITAGE, AND KNOWLEDGE INFRASTRUCTURES

Edited by

Hansjörg Dilger, Barbara Göbel, Lars-Christian Koch,
Stephanie Schütze, and Alexis Th. von Poser



“Now that colonial objects can no longer be seen as mute, but speak to us in multiple voices, it is acute to attend to the roles they play and relations they establish. *Collections as Relations* is a rich and novel approach to think the complex politics of collections.”

Amade M'charek, *University of Amsterdam*

“Tailored for scholars and professionals in anthropology, history, art, and cultural heritage, the book explores nuanced facets of cultural identity, colonial legacies, and museum ethics, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue across multifaceted subjects in cultural studies and heritage preservation.”

Maryam Mansab, *Department of Museum and Antiquities, Zanzibar*

“*Collections as Relations* is itself a fascinating collection that shows just how productive collections can be for exploring relations of multiple kinds. These include those that reveal forgotten, suppressed and ambiguous histories, as well as those that open up possibilities for activating new relations.”

Sharon Macdonald, *Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*



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Collections as Relations

This book explores anthropological and global art collections as a catalyst, a medium, and an expression of relations. Relations—between and among objects and media, people, and material and immaterial contexts—define, configure, and potentially transform collection-related social and professional networks, discourses and practices, and increasingly museums and other collecting institutions themselves. The contributors argue that a focus on the—often contested—making and remaking of relations provides a unique conceptual entrypoint for understanding collections’—and ‘their’ objects’ and media’s—complex histories, contemporary webs of interactions, and potential futures. The chapters examine the local, translocal, and transregional relations of collections with regard to their affective, aesthetic, performative, and socio-moral qualities and situate them in the larger geopolitical constellations of precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial settings. Together they investigate ongoing shifts in the relations of collections and collecting institutions by identifying alternative approaches to conceive of, and deal with, anthropological and global art collections, objects, and media in the future. The book is of interest to scholars from anthropology, global art history, museum studies, and heritage studies.

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Collections as Relations

Contestations of Belonging, Cultural Heritage, and Knowledge
Infrastructures

*Edited by Hansjörg Dilger, Barbara Göbel, Lars-Christian Koch,
Stephanie Schütze, and Alexis Th. von Poser*

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Introduction

Collections as Relations—Contestations of Belonging, Cultural Heritage, and Knowledge Infrastructures

*Hansjörg Dilger, Barbara Göbel,
Lars-Christian Koch, Stephanie Schütze, and
Alexis Th. von Poser*

Anthropological and global art collections—and the infrastructures, objects, and media they comprise—are both the starting point and the outcome of relations. Objects and media are created by artists, craftsmen, and other people on the basis of specialist knowledge, practice, and social interactions. They are shown off and worn by their owners; they are used in everyday life as well as in ritual and religious contexts, thereby establishing relationships with spirits, ancestors, and other human and non-human actors. Objects are given as gifts, but they are also shared, bartered, sold, and—especially in contexts of violence—stolen or taken with force.

In museums, archives, and libraries, these entities are stored together with other objects and media, categorised into groups according to their (presumably) shared provenance and/or aesthetic, material, and functional properties. Objects and media are admired in exhibitions, but they are also the focus of research, teaching, and political and/or activist debates. Some of them are contested with regard to their legal and moral ownership; and in a slowly growing number of cases, they are returned to the people and communities from where they were taken—or they are transferred to other collecting institutions, again increasingly in countries from where they originate.

This volume explores anthropological and global art collections as a catalyst, a medium, and an expression of relations. Building on ethnographic research in Germany, as well as in various parts of Africa, Asia, and Latin America from which the objects and media in question originate, they highlight the material, temporal, social, and affective connectivities that anthropological and global art collections imply, create, and evoke. Relations—between and among objects and media, people, and, in a wider sense, material and immaterial environments—define, configure, and potentially transform collection-related social and professional networks, discourses and practices, and—possibly—museums and other collecting institutions (such as libraries and archives) themselves.

Our contributors demonstrate that the focus on relations provides a conceptual entry point for understanding the collections’—and ‘their’ objects’ and media’s—complex entangled histories, contemporary webs of interactions, as well as their potential relational futures. In particular, they examine the local, translocal, and transregional interdependencies of collections and objects with regard to their affective, aesthetic, performative, and socio-moral qualities, and situate them in larger political-economic constellations and power relations. In all these regards, the contributors to this volume investigate ongoing transformations in the relations with collections and the management practices of collecting institutions by identifying alternative approaches to conceive of, and deal with, anthropological and global art collections, infrastructures, objects, and media in the future.

In conceptualising collections as relations, it is important to first critically reflect on the history and use of the term “collection” itself. Collecting as an anthropological and global art museum, library, and archival practice is closely intertwined with the ways in which museums and other collecting institutions in Europe, North America, and metropolises in the “Global South”¹ positioned themselves in relation to “different socio-material networks” in the colonial context of the 19th century (Bennett et al. 2017, 5). As Bennett et al. (ibid.) have argued, especially anthropological museums played a seminal role in governing and managing the populations they studied by collecting, organising, and exhibiting knowledge about “non-European” and/or “Indigenous” people, both for the “public spheres of the major metropolitan powers” and for “the institutions and practices of colonial administrations” themselves. Furthermore, anthropological, global art and other (e.g., natural science or archaeological²) museums—and the ways in which they exhibited the vast numbers of objects and associated media they assembled in comparatively short periods of time—became complicit “in the performance of race and colonialism, and the subjectivity of the museum collection and of the museum visitor” (Geismar 2015a, 188).

Under these circumstances, the epistemic violence to which objects from colonial contexts—and the individuals and communities from which these objects were taken—were subjected through the extinction and overwriting of histories, subjectivities, and knowledges (Mignolo 2007, 451) was not only an inherent aspect of the everyday practice of collecting institutions.³ It was also an important reference point for the self-fashioning of a growing urban elite in imperialist and colonialist centres that embraced ethnology as an “internationally recognised science” that underscored their own “worldliness” as expressed, for instance, in “Alexander von Humboldt’s cosmopolitan vision” (Penny 2003, 18). Against this background, a decolonial engagement with “collections” must problematise not only the historical circumstances and the concept of “collecting” itself, but also the categories and demarcations established in these historical and institutional contexts, which produced, among other things, an asymmetrical and hierarchical relation between “ethnographic” and “(global) art collections” (Förster 2013).⁴

Second, thinking about collections—and the material and immaterial objects, media and infrastructures they comprise—as *relations* requires that we engage with the various social, cultural, and political contexts in which these relationships are (re-)produced, discussed, and negotiated today. This engagement can lead to new understandings of the history and future of collections and objects, both in the short and long terms. In recent years, anthropological and global art collections and the institutions that host them have come under renewed public scrutiny in relation to “[especially] Europe’s troubled encounters with those societies that were under Imperial rule or came under some sort of Western sovereignty” (Appadurai 2020, 45). As a result, issues of repatriation, and the right of museums and other collecting institutions to retain certain objects, especially those from colonialist and imperialist contexts, have been contested (Schorch 2020, 1). Collecting institutions have been urged—both by external and internal critics:

to enquire into the ethics of their (...) collections acquired under colonial conditions, to face up to a new era of restitution of human remains, and the possibility also of the restitution of colonial artefacts, artworks and documentation, especially those assembled within a ‘context of injustice.’
(Rassool 2022, 56)

In these circumstances, the ongoing debate about restitution and the (im-)possibilities of decolonising anthropological museums (and other collecting institutions, including those for global art, archaeological and natural science objects, and media) (Hicks 2020) has placed these institutions “in a period of upheaval” and at “the center of a new, previously unknown attention” (Abiti & Laely 2020). As public criticism has focused primarily on anthropological museums as “a continuing agency of colonial relations and thinking, and/or as irrelevant to contemporary social and political life” (Macdonald et al. 2017, 95–96), collecting institutions that have benefited from their colonial legacies have been portrayed primarily in terms of their shortcomings (ibid., 96).

At the same time, however, it would be too simplistic to reduce this discussion to a (potentially intractable) “crisis” of the anthropological or global art museum, as their situation is simultaneously marked “by new energy and dynamism that have not been seen for a long time” (Abiti and Laely 2020). A rapidly growing body of literature—about new ways of collaborating with “communities of origin” (ibid.)⁵, about the need to diversify engagements with museum collections despite the pushback from conservative and far-right forces (Macdonald 2022), and about the future of the ethnographic museum itself (Harris and O’Hanlon 2013)—underlines the growing desire to examine the recent “reformist project” (Macdonald et al. 2017, 96) of collecting institutions in terms of how they are able to transcend the colonial legacy of their work by being aware of and explicitly addressing “the risks of potential neocolonialism” (ibid.).

Against this backdrop, this volume aims to contribute to the growing body of work that has explored the multiple possibilities, obstacles, and hurdles that the recent engagements by a wide range of actors (including researchers, curators, activists, and Indigenous communities) with anthropological and global art collections, and the push to transform collecting institutions as a whole, entail. By focusing on the relationships that both enable and (in part) create these engagements in the first place, we position collections not as fixed entities, but as formations in the making with their respective underlying epistemologies, (knowledge) practices, and infrastructures.

We argue that the conceptual perspective of thinking about collections as “ways of being” (Moutu 2007) gives us insights into emerging (as well as already existing) forms of belonging, between material and immaterial objects and different human and non-human actors. We also assume that new—and often contested—perceptions of cultural heritage are coming to the fore in these relationships, raising new questions about the rightful ownership and the adequate management of these collections (or of specific objects or media) and the legal regimes and value frameworks associated with them (local, national, or international). Finally, the chapters focus on how knowledge infrastructures, which we understand as specific forms of institutional relations, “produce” collections and collecting institutions, and how collaborative and (possibly) decolonial forms of “knowing” and “collecting” can be formulated against this background. In all these respects, then, the contributions to this volume explore ongoing shifts in the relations of and with collections and collecting institutions by suggesting alternative approaches to conceptualising and engaging with collections and collecting institutions, objects, and media in the future.

In the following sections, we will first position our approach in relation to existing research on object ontologies and relations; growing pressures to transform collection institutions, such as through new forms of collaboration and/or decolonial work; and emerging opportunities for collaboration between universities and collection institutions. We will then argue how our focus on collections as relations opens up new perspectives on (1) the micropolitics and dynamics of belonging, (2) the constructions of cultural heritage and property disputes, and (3) the emergence of new kinds of knowledge infrastructures within and beyond institutional environments.

In all these regards, we argue that the various aspects of collections and the objects’ relationalities are currently contested. These relationships have become the subject of new debates and perspectives among researchers, curators, communities, and other civil society actors—both in the “Global South” and “Global North”—and are being challenged in the ways that have largely been taken for granted in the institutional settings of museums, libraries, and archives. While such contestations can lead to new ways of thinking of and managing the evolving relationships, there is also an inertia and a resistance to embrace change in institutional settings. Consequently, while the focus on collections as relations may offer perspectives on how

collecting institutions and those who interact with and are responsible for them can reposition themselves in the face of current contestations, the actual outcomes of this dynamic are still uncertain.

Collections as relations—ontologies, networks, and (affective) world-making

With the material (Miller 2009) and ontological turns (Viveiros de Castro 2004) in Social and Cultural Anthropology and its related disciplines, collections, objects, and media have been attributed with their own capacities for world- and relationship-making (Moutu 2007; Bell 2017) as well as their own “political and affective weight” (Harrison 2013a, 5). From this perspective, long-established “universal truths” that rested on partly rigid perceptions of dichotomies between nature and culture, subject and object, and humans and things have been called into question (De la Cadena 2010, 342). As De la Cadena (*ibid.*, 336) has argued, by striving for “pluriversal politics” that acknowledges the existence of non-human entities and beings *in their own right*, it is time:

to take seriously (perhaps literally) the presence in politics of those actors, which, being other than human, the dominant disciplines assigned either to the sphere of nature (where they were to be known by science) or to the metaphysical and symbolic fields of knowledge.

Inspired by such thinking, anthropologists and other scholars have started to explore collections that include objects, media, and infrastructures as “bundles of relations” in which objects and things were repositioned “as key participants (variously conceived of as actants, agents, or actors) in how human sociality unfolds” (Bell 2017, 246). They have examined the dynamic “networks of social and material interaction” in which objects and artefacts “have been and are still active in forming social relations between varied persons and groups” (Byrne et al. 2011, 4) by drawing people, things, knowledges, and infrastructures together (see also Harrison 2013a, 20).

Against this background, our volume conceptualises different kinds of collections, objects, and media as zones of contact and encounters (Clifford 1997; see next section, (Im)possibilities of decolonial collaboration and institutional transformation), which are defined by their potential to assemble a wide range of human and non-human entities in the process of affecting and transforming each other. This capacity of an object to have “an effect on its vicinity” (Fausto 2020, 12) does not necessarily imply that objects or artefacts have intentional agency, but rather that they are part of a “network in which people and things are entangled” (*ibid.*, 11) in the making and becoming of their everyday worlds.

A central role in the discussion of the agency and world-making capacity of collections, objects, and media was played by Kopytoff’s (1986) focus on “the cultural biographies of things.” According to Kopytoff (*ibid.*, 68),

a biographical perspective examines an object as “a culturally constructed entity, endowed with culturally specific meanings, and classified and reclassified into culturally constituted categories,” depending on the context in which the object or thing is made, acquired, used, and ceases to exist.

Extending this perspective, objects, media, and infrastructures have been positioned within broader socio-material networks with their own capacity to make meaning, emphasising the mutually intertwined relationship between human and (other) material and immaterial entities in constituting the world in which we live (Hodder 2012). Furthermore, while Kopytoff’s approach has been criticised for focusing too much on the (linear) lives of objects with their concrete beginning and end points and independent of their multiple antecedents and afterlives (Hahn and Weiss 2013), the approach has continued to inspire anthropological engagements with the contested, fragmentary, and often shifting contexts that shape the paths of material and immaterial objects and things across time and space (*ibid.*) and, simultaneously, shape and constitute these contexts.

While material and immaterial objects have been attributed with the power to establish social and affective connections between human and more-than-human life-worlds (Cassella and Woodward 2014), related studies have generally maintained an ontological separation between these different spheres. In contrast, Espírito Santo (2017, 277) argues that objects and things can be understood *as affect* that is not only embodied or exclusively produced by human actors. Objects and media understood as affect can become constitutive of the ontogenesis of “affective assemblages” (*ibid.*, 277)—they *are* the pain and loss, but also the hope, that has become an integral part of individual and collective engagements with objects and media in contexts of (post-)colonial violence (Singh 2019, 62).

In the context of our volume, the focus on the affective capacities of objects and media is instructive for the ways in which new forms of attachment and belonging emerge in encounters and interactions with collections and collecting institutions, and how these encounters are marked by ambiguity and conflict in (post)colonial contexts (Dilger 2023), as well as the potential to establish an emancipatory counter-narrative to the often still colonially shaped representational strategies of collecting institutions (Tolia-Kelly 2016, 907). This perspective also asks about the methodological challenges of exploring the multiple sensory, aesthetic, and socio-political qualities (Dudley 2010) inherent in objects and media—and how these experiences can be articulated and accounted for in encounters inside and outside of collecting institutions.

(Im)possibilities of decolonial collaboration and institutional transformation

While collections, objects, and media have inherent capacities for making worlds and relationships, the emergence of (new kinds of) relationships

around and with specific collections and objects cannot be understood independently of the broader political and social conditions under which these relationships take shape. Thus, while most of the contributions in this volume focus on collections, objects, and media in specific local, national, and/or transnational contexts, they understand them as the result of intertwined histories that reflect economic globalisation, colonial and imperialist expansion, and the geopolitics of knowledge production and asymmetric circulation.

In postcolonial contexts, collecting institutions, especially in the fields of anthropology and global art and also in archaeology and natural sciences, have undergone significant transformations. Current debates about access to collections, co-management, (re)circulation, and ownership of objects and media by “communities of origin” are profoundly changing the (self-) perceptions of museums, libraries, and archives. They are creating new approaches to collections and collecting institutions as “relational entities” (Basu 2011, 28) as well as new uncertainties that challenge established management practices. Moreover, digital transformation is fostering unprecedented dynamics of recirculation, reappropriation, and resignification of objects and media (Basu 2015), exposing alternative epistemologies and object ontologies while creating new inequalities in the resulting relationships, e.g. with regard to processes of digital exclusion (*ibid.*, 349).

In all these respects, collecting institutions have been imagined as “contact zones” that can evoke and provide insights into the co-constitution of the relationships among a wide range of human and non-human actors with their capacities to influence and transform one another (Byrne et al. 2011). In the context of museum work, Clifford (1997) applied the notion of the contact zone to highlight the potential of actively bringing together divergent cultural interpretations and groups to understand and exhibit ethnographic collections and objects in the context of (post)colonial power relations. He drew on Pratt’s (1991, 34) definition of contact zones as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths.” Against this backdrop, the concept of the contact zone aimed to position collections and objects as “generative grounds for negotiations and resources for opening up new perspectives (...) and as ‘boundary objects’ [that] facilitate the collaboration of diverse sets of interests” (Bell 2017, 249)—*despite* and *because* of the multiple challenges such collaborations face in the context of postcolonial power relations and interdependencies.

Over the past decade, collecting institutions have engaged in unprecedented collaborations with the communities and social and political actors from which their objects and media historically originate. This commitment to collaboration can be understood as a new kind of “relational ethics” (Sarr and Savoy 2018) that has shaped and transformed the relationships of collecting institutions with communities, researchers, artists, activists,

and governments from the collections' countries of origin—as well as with their related migratory and diasporic contexts—in often fundamental ways, opening up new arenas of interaction and negotiation.

In individual cases, these new relationships have led to the return of objects to the places and people to which they originally belonged (Bodenstein et al. 2022). In other cases, they have become spaces for new ways of learning about objects and media (Scholz 2017), co-curating exhibitions (virtually and/or onsite) (Labischinski 2020), or co-creating new digital presences around these objects and media hitherto deemed “seemingly lifeless museum objects, gathering dust in museum stores or in little-visited displays and divorced from the cultural and performative contexts that originally animated them” (Basu 2015, 339). Such collaboration is often also aimed at broader institutional change, not least in the collections' countries of origin themselves, where cooperation can open up new avenues for societies and underfunded cultural institutions (*ibid.*, 360) aiming to (re-)engage with their own histories and identities (Abiti 2019), as well as for “cultural reconciliation” (*ibid.*; Shelton 2019).

While “collaboration” has become one of the most fundamental principles guiding ongoing transformations of management and curatorial practices in collecting institutions (see Schorch 2017), the collaborative ideals suggested by the notion of the contact zone can also gloss over neo-colonial continuities (Scholz 2019), thereby keeping museums in a hegemonic position while suppressing oppositional discourses (Boast 2011). Collaborations in postcolonial contexts are often characterised by mistrust and conflict and require intense engagement from all sides to build mutual trust and interest and to create “a give-and-take-situation and attitude” (Abungu 2019, 36). Collaboration has also been criticised for often placing the responsibility for translation between divergent epistemologies on Indigenous experts without changing structural conditions to better address the concerns and demands of communities in the countries of origin (Mithlo 2004).

The contributors to our volume are aware of the persistent power asymmetries in collaborative research and cultural work (Weber-Sinn and Ivanov 2020) as well as the inherent “affective ambiguities” that shape *any* collaboration with community actors in postcolonial and (post)violent contexts (see Dilger, Mashimi, and Nyazy 2023); these ambiguities must be actively addressed and managed for collaborations to thrive (*ibid.*), and to make them more than “tokenistic claims of inclusion” (Golding and Modest 2013) by collecting institutions which are finding themselves under pressure of transformation. The authors are also aware of the internal power relations and inertia of collecting institutions that often slow down or block more fundamental structural transformations (Ivanov and Bens 2021), not least in terms of processes of decolonisation and diversification (see Dilger and Warstat 2023).

New opportunities for (transregional) cooperation between universities and collecting institutions

This volume brings together contributions by scholars from both universities and collecting institutions, although collaboration between the two institutional fields is not systematically established either in Germany or internationally. The institutionalisation of anthropology as a discipline in the second half of the 19th century was closely linked to the establishment of the museum as a colonial institution for the storage, study, and exhibition of objects from the colonies, both from the “Global South” and the “Global North” (Bennett 1995). In this constitutional phase, anthropology was concerned with questions of material culture, for which the museum provided an institutional space (Noack 2015, 44). In the first decades of the 20th century, the focus of collecting institutions shifted to an educational mission that produced practical knowledge for national imperialist goals (Penny 2003, 119). This separation of research and exhibition was further institutionalised in the 1960s, when academic anthropology’s turn towards “social and mental culture” (Sturtevant 1969, 632) outweighed museums’ focus on material objects (Adams 2015, 88–89).

The re-emergence of material culture studies in British and US anthropology since the 1980s (Hicks 2010) and in German anthropology since the 1990s (Hahn 2014) has brought museum and collecting institutions back into the focus of the discipline (Macdonald 2006; Silverman 2015). However, both internationally (Bouquet 2001; Kreps 2019) and in the German context (Noack 2015, 59–60), the need to overcome a widespread, historically grown dichotomy between a museum focus on material culture and an investment in social and cultural analysis at the university continues to be voiced.

With ongoing debates about the decolonisation of collecting institutions and the broad international push for the restitution of cultural objects and artefacts acquired in colonial contexts (Sarr and Savoy 2018), the need for closer institutional collaboration has become especially apparent in the field of provenance research, which traces how objects were often forcibly taken from their places of origin and brought to colonialist and imperialist centres (Baumann and von Poser 2016; Ivanov 2017; O’Hanlon and Welsch 2000). While individual institutions and researchers have addressed the often-problematic origins of such collections since the 1970s (Paczensky and Ganslmayr 1984), these concerns rarely resulted in the development of systematic approaches to examining and addressing the multiperspectival histories and futures of particular collections or objects.

The chapters in this volume investigate the object and media relationalities that result from the exploration of extended zones of contact—of objects, media, researchers, activists, artists, curators, and other (human as well as non-human) actors involved—across organisational, institutional, and national as well as regional boundaries

(Andratschke 2016). They take into account entangled colonial and post-colonial histories as well as transnational trajectories of objects and media in collections, pointing to the need for an “institutionally interconnected way of researching” (Förster, Edenheiser, and Fründt 2018, 23) and the “institutional implementation of systematic research processes and robust methodical approaches” (Schorch 2020, 4). Moreover, many chapters are co-authored by researchers based in or directly related to the collections’ contexts of origin, thus engaging in shared processes of knowledge production and thinking critically together about the often-violent histories and potential futures of collections, objects, and media located predominantly in the institutions of the “Global North.”

Given the above critical comments about collaboration and the often-massive structural barriers to true transformation in collecting institutions, one might ask whether museums and other collecting institutions “really have the capacities to foster critical thinking and new knowledge in the manner of the best modern universities?” (Appadurai 2020, 47). This is certainly a valid question—and for cross-institutional collaborations to succeed, the different working conditions and approaches of researchers at museums and other collecting institutions and at universities must be recognised (Hahn 2017). At the same time, however, universities are themselves actors and outcomes of colonial history (Bhambra et al. 2018), and processes of knowledge production, as well as the structural and personnel composition of academia, face similar defensiveness when it comes to processes of diversification and decolonisation (Ahmed 2012; Çağlar and Chan de Avila 2021).

In our view, therefore, it is only through *joint* efforts that institutional spaces can be created and sustained for symmetrical encounters and systematic collaborations between universities and collecting institutions; these spaces should simultaneously be able to bridge historically established divisions between university-based anthropology and global art studies, on the one hand, and collecting institutions and various social actors and communities from the collections’ countries and contexts of origin and their diasporas, on the other hand (see also von Oswald and Tinius 2020). Building such critical spaces for shared thinking, knowledge production, and co-management will provide an important foundation for imagining and forging more symmetrical relationships with community representatives (Golding and Modest 2013), as well as with researchers from different disciplines, curators, artists, activists, and collecting institutions and political decision-makers—both in the collections’ contexts of origin and in the transnational and transregional spaces they have created over time.⁶

In the following, we situate the chapters of this volume in three thematic parts that reflect the ongoing contestations and debates in collections’ relationalities: (1) Politics of identity and belonging, (2) Constructions of cultural heritage and property disputes, and (3) Epistemic cultures and knowledge infrastructures.

PART I: Politics of Identity and Belonging

Collections, objects, and media are always implicated in the articulation of individual and collective identities, as well as various forms of affective, material, and/or political belonging. The chapters in Part I of the book are based on extensive ethnographic research in different regions of Peru (Chapter 1, Ingrid Kummels and Gisela Cánepa Koch) and the Upper Rio Negro Region in Brazil (Chapter 2, Thiago da Costa Oliveira and Andrea Scholz) as well as in the transregional context between contemporary Germany and colonial Southwest Africa (Chapter 3, Magdalena Buchczyk). They discuss how different actors—members of social groups and citizens of countries from which collections, objects, or media originate; visitors to museums and users of other collecting institutions; curators, museum educators, and researchers; artists and cultural institutions—articulate their identities and affiliations vis-à-vis collections and/or particular artefacts.

The chapters also explore how collections and objects and their specific aesthetic, sensory, and sociopolitical qualities play a central role in opening up new affective and material spaces among the actors involved in terms of their cultural, political, and/or historical belonging, as well as their individual and collective future(s) (see Modest et al. 2019). Last but not least, the contributions discuss how the dynamics of dependency and exploitation, in which the histories of specific collections and collecting institutions are embedded, can be addressed and (potentially) overcome through collaborative projects with communities, researchers, curators, and artists in the collections' countries and contexts of origin.

In the postcolonial context, collecting institutions, both in anthropology and in global art, have undergone significant transformations, and the nationalist agenda of the colonial empire has increasingly given way to the idea of representing the plurality, diversity, and contingency of contemporary societies through objects and media (McLean 2005, 1). As the chapters in Part I show, the initiatives of Indigenous communities in the Upper Rio Region (Thiago da Costa Oliveira and Andrea Scholz) as well as of grassroots researchers and activists in Peru (Ingrid Kummels and Gisela Cánepa Koch) play a seminal role in pushing for the pluralisation of debates about and within collecting institutions. Furthermore, Black, Indigeneous, and People of Colour (BIPoC) scholars and activists have challenged taken-for-granted representational practices in the display of “objects” from anthropological and global art collections in collection institutions in Germany (Magdalena Buchczyk).

At the same time, however, the idea of representing a “multicultural” or “diverse” society is still at odds with the underlying agendas of national museums in particular, as the case of the Humboldt Forum in Berlin shows (Ivanov and Bens 2021; see also Chapter 2 by Thiago da Costa Oliveira and Andrea Scholz in this volume). Collecting institutions struggle to systematically incorporate the voices of formerly colonised individuals and

communities into their work (ibid.), and people directly connected to the contexts from which the objects and media of these collecting institutions originate often still hold the position of “the culturally reified and objectified ‘others’” (Tolia-Kelly 2016, 903; see also Chapter 3 by Magdalena Buchczyk in this volume).

While current debates in collecting institutions focus on how to engage “communities of origin” in the research and exhibition of objects and media, the experiences and perspectives of the persons and communities involved are often not sufficiently considered. In recent years, Indigenous actors and groups—as well as researchers, artists, and activists from collections’ countries of origin and the associated diaspora (Palaić and Škafar 2019)—have sought to (re)engage with the objects and media that originally belonged to their communities. They “are actively seeking to reclaim their tangible and intangible heritage,” and they “are asserting claims to self-representation and control over curation” (Greene 2015, 3). In many cases, new community museums have been established in the contexts of the origins of the collections, providing the basis for reclaiming an often violent past and restoring a sense of belonging through the cultural heritage of the communities (ibid.; Camarena and Morales 2007; Rassool 2007; Mbewe 2021; see also Ingrid Kummels and Gisela Cánepa Koch in this part).

In all these respects, it is important to keep in mind that all of these processes are embedded in the institutional dependencies and infrastructural hierarchies that shape identities and the negotiation of belonging in transregional and postcolonial contexts (Golding and Modest 2019); also, these are based on long-standing perceptions of racial and ethnic hierarchies and “the broader epistemologies and moral economies of collecting” in the colonial and postcolonial context (see Magdalena Buchczyk in this part). Furthermore, perceptions of racial and cultural difference that were shaped during early stages of collection building and display “in a particular geometry of power relations” (Tolia-Kelly 2016, 897) remain deeply engrained in social realities and interactions to this day (see also Bennet et al. 2017, 7) and have left long-lasting marks on the self-perceptions and bodies of colonised populations (ibid.).

Part I of the book starts with the chapter by Ingrid Kummels and Gisela Cánepa Koch who explore how local and international archives of anthropological collections—which include records of speeches, music, and dance—are crucial to mobilising identities and a sense of belonging in contemporary Peru. Based on collaborative research with two communities in the northern region of Peru and the central rainforest, they argue that “everyday archiving” is the result of individual and collective engagements with historical artefacts. The emerging soundscapes must be understood in the context of the implementation of UNESCO’s cultural heritage policy and the long history of the political creation of *comunidades nativas* in Peru in the 1970s. This dynamic is also driven by local cultural entrepreneurs and grassroots researchers and activists who play a central role in initiating

collaborations with existing archives and materials. Finally, the revival of songs, dances, and other cultural practices in the context of identity formation depends heavily on the dynamics of mediatisation and the publication of (engagements with) historical records through social media such as Facebook and YouTube.

Collaborative practices between curators, researchers, and Indigenous partners are also the focus of Thiago da Costa Oliveira and Andrea Scholz's chapter. Drawing on a series of collaborative projects with partners from the Upper Rio Negro region (Northern Amazonia), they argue that in such collaborations, things, and artefacts become "mediators of reciprocal relationships" and provide an opportunity to learn about the interconnectedness of these things with plants, animals, people, and other beings in a more than human environment. However, while such collaborations shed light on the multiple perspectives, connections, spaces (epistemological and material), and socialities that develop from objects and things, they also have their limitations. These include, among other things, the limited capacity of collecting institutions to engage in such "deep" collaborations for *all* of their holdings, as well as the question of how the knowledge that emerges in such processes is useful to whom. Nevertheless, the authors conclude that new collaborative practices—and the creativity and openness they require—have to be "taken seriously as paradigms for creating new and sustainable relationships between museums and communities."

The concluding chapter of Part I by Magdalena Buchczyk examines the exhibition practices by the Museum of European Cultures in Berlin as a way of "animating relatedness" in the context of shifting curatorial strategies, and especially the recently identified theme of "glocal Europe," which understands "Europe's history as a global formation based on an unequal distribution of rights and resources, steeped in the legacies of colonialism and the Holocaust." Buchczyk focuses on the example of the so-called "Namibian dress," which was allegedly first worn by a German settler in colonial Southwest Africa and recently displayed in two major exhibitions in Berlin and Dresden as a way of mediating and catalysing these interconnected histories. However, while the exhibitions aimed to explore the emerging "visual regimes of whiteness and racial politics in the colonial setting" by juxtaposing it with another colonial "object," the figure of a "Micronesian girl," the resulting representational practices were problematic. This was emphasised in a conversation between Magdalena Buchczyk and artist and sociologist Natasha A. Kelly who argues that it was especially this juxtaposition which "perpetuated the visual tropes of hypersexualised women of colour."

PART II: Constructions of Cultural Heritage and Property Disputes

In Part II of the book, diverging constructions of cultural heritage and disputes over property are analysed from a transregional perspective. The chapters are based on different approaches to collections that originally came from two regions: Africa and Latin America. The collections from

Africa came from Cameroon and Namibia, and the collections from Latin America came from Bolivia and Paraguay. These collections are now stored and exhibited in different German museums and collecting institutions (Berlin, Bonn, Munich, and Stuttgart). All kinds of collections—those of “global art” as much as of “ethnographic” objects—have long been subject to debates regarding cultural heritage and demands by Indigenous societies and governments of the countries of origin for compensation or restitution of their property. A large number of objects and (audiovisual) records of many local groups and societies, which are still exhibited or preserved in museums, libraries, and archives in the so-called “Global North,” were acquired in colonial and imperial contexts.

The chapters critically discuss the conditions under which the appropriation and collection of material and immaterial objects and knowledge occurred, focusing on European colonialism but also on pre- and postcolonial provenance. Focusing on Cameroonian artefacts in German museums, Chapter 4 by Richard Tsogang Fossi exposes European colonisers’ extraction and accumulation methods of African cultural, zoological, and botanical collections. In Chapter 6, Julia Binter discusses the role of the Ethnological Museum Berlin in acquiring and appropriating objects in the colonial context in Africa. Yet, she also shows that a large number of objects from Namibia can also be traced back to missionary contexts before the official colonisation by the German Empire. In Chapter 5, Naomi Rattunde, Karoline Noack, and Carla Jaimes Betancourt demonstrate that collection items were and continue to be acquired by collector–ethnographers in postcolonial times. By tracing ethnographers’ journeys, time periods, routes, contacts, and encounters with Ayoróde culture in Bolivia and Paraguay, they explore specific circumstances of the objects’ provenance.

Current studies that examine the circumstances under which the material and immaterial artefacts and the associated cultural knowledge were included in the collections also ask with what intentions and by whom they were (re-) constructed as “cultural heritage.” Today, constructions of “cultural heritage” are critically discussed in Social and Cultural Anthropology as well as in Heritage Studies (Harrison 2013b; Tauschek 2013; Ivanov 2017; Förster 2019). Recent approaches differ from essentialist and static ideas of “cultural heritage” and emphasise the procedural and relational character of heritage (Harrison et al. 2020). These approaches not only include the protection and mobility of objects and knowledge (Hahn and Weiss 2013) but also address issues of renegotiation, alternative interpretations, and the involvement in heritage research of representatives from countries of origin through collaborative working methods (Laely et al. 2018; Reyels et al. 2018; Scholz 2019).

The chapters in this part of the book show how museums and collecting institutions are now places and targets of ongoing negotiation processes (Naguib 2013; Tauschek 2013), which fundamentally question the concepts of “heritage,” “museums,” and “collections,” and lead to their (potential) reformulation (Geismar 2015b; Schorch 2020). They also explore how

collaborative methods can be used to understand property claims in post-colonial and highly asymmetrical environments.

Referring to Cameroonian artefacts in museums in Munich and Stuttgart as well as in the Ethnological Museum in Berlin, Richard Tsogang Fossi's chapter examines whether the concept of "shared heritage" is suitable for discussing their status and relational potential. Addressing the question of ownership of art objects taken in the colonial context and transferred to Europe at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, he argues that discussions of "colonial collections" must go beyond the simple question of ownership and materiality. They must confront the historical circumstances of their disappearance from their home communities while dismantling current processes of epistemic violence and neocolonial domination. He concludes that "shared heritage" is not the appropriate concept as it gives the impression that communities of origin play an equal role in the processes of managing this heritage. In Tsogang Fossi's view, the recasting of colonial collections as "shared heritage" in Europe obscures the dual sensitivity of these collections and includes tendencies towards the normalisation of colonial injustice.

In their chapter, Naomi Rattunde, Karoline Noack, and Carla Jaimes Betancourt focus on the concept of "glocal place" to analyse the Ayoréode collection from Chaco Boreal in Bolivia and Paraguay in the BASA Museum at the University of Bonn. With the term "glocal place," they point out that the Ayoréode collection cannot be located in one geographical unit, but extends across several and thus contains both global-local, i.e., glocal, and local-local, i.e., translocal relationships. This lens helps them to examine the movements and power relations reflected in the displacements of objects and things in museum and heritage contexts, including the gaps and silences. The collection was established up until the mid-20th century, when missionary societies settled down most of the Ayoréode. Previously, their way of life had been characterised by movement and displacement, both voluntary and forced. The authors describe how the artefacts and collectors' movements merge with those of individual and institutional actors involved in collecting activities, including their own involvement. In addition, the collection and the engaged actors were and are integrated into global contexts such as colonisation, Christianisation, and ethnographic research.

In her article, Julia Binter discusses how a Namibian-German team dealt with forms of knowledge contained in objects from Namibia in the Ethnological Museum in Berlin as part of the collaborative project "Confronting Colonial Pasts, Envisioning Creative Futures." Using the concept of "sensuous knowledge," she examines the way in which the team worked with different forms of knowledge generation, which consisted of the critical reading of colonial archives, oral traditions, and special skills as well as performative and embodied knowledge. By asking whether museums can become spaces for diverse knowledge creation, she discusses the potential and the challenges of collaborative, postcolonial provenance research. On a wider scope, the chapter deals

with the political and institutional context in which the research project, the exhibition, and the return of several collection items to Namibia were embedded. Julia Binter concludes that new forms of pluralisation and translation of knowledge are crucial for more inclusive, sustainable, and equitable approaches to historical collections; for example, by shedding light on prior omissions such as extrapolating a female perspective from historical archives whose contents are dominated by male perspectives.

Part III: Epistemic Cultures and Knowledge Infrastructures

Part III of the book focuses on materiality, relationality, and knowledge practices. It addresses the co-constitution of collections in contexts shaped by cultural differences and multiple inequalities. In doing so, it places a special focus on collections as knowledge infrastructures. The contributions by Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz (Chapter 7) on gold antiquities from Southeast Asia and by Viola König (Chapter 8) on the historical Jacobsen collections from the American Northwest Coast and Alaska analyse processes of appropriation, circulation, and valorisation of objects. They show how, through social interactions in different cultural contexts, spatial, and temporal frames, diverse, often contradictory meanings of the objects are created, negotiated, and transformed. In this sense, objects encapsulate not only multiple cultural meanings, but also microcosms of past and present social relations. The transborder mobilisation of objects towards “central” knowledge infrastructures, such as the ethnological and global art museums in Berlin, produces transregional entanglements inscribed into the objects.

The starting point of Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz’s research is the fact that in many museum collections, such as that of the Ethnological Museum in Berlin, very few gold artefacts come from controlled archaeological excavations. The majority are of untraced origin, also from looted sites. While the former allows for adequate dating and important insights into cultural relationships and historical contexts, this is not the case for untraced gold objects. However, using gold artefacts from the Indonesian islands of Java and Sumatra (Southeast Asia), Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz demonstrates their relevance for understanding processes of (re-)appropriation, (re-)circulation, exclusion, and contestation. These artefacts serve as powerful agents of historical narratives, but have an ambiguous status. Depending on the context of interaction, these gold artefacts are perceived as identity markers, knowledge objects, or commodities. They navigate between different social, cultural, and economic contexts as well as legal regimes—the art market, illicit trade, museum collections, curatorial research, and archaeological excavations—and are thus embedded in multiple networks. Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz emphasises the importance of reconnecting the gold artefacts with their places of origin by articulating often disconnected knowledge infrastructures, materialities, and knowledge practices.

The transnational circulation of people, artefacts, and knowledge is also the focus of Viola König's chapter. She focuses on the 1880s collections of the Norwegian brothers Adrian and Filip Jacobsen. Most of the collections, which comprise some 7000 objects from the northwest coast of the United States and Canada and from Alaska, are housed in the Ethnological Museum in Berlin. The historical–ethnographic objects have not only been a source of research for international scholars, but also an important reference for Indigenous groups, as they represent a materialisation of often forgotten aspects of their cultures. Adopting a long-term perspective, Viola König describes the origins, contexts of acquisition, and trajectories of the objects. She shows how the Jacobsen collections encapsulate collecting practices, commercial networks, and museum policies that captured not only the interest of artists, museum curators, and academics. Viola König especially underlines the importance of these historical–ethnographic collections and the knowledge infrastructures that have sustained them for Indigenous groups today, for their identities and collective memories.

Through the lens of flowers and herbs, Juliane Noth (Chapter 9) analyses the role of *Wissensfiguren* (figures of knowledge) in Chinese art and visual culture. Discussing recent shifts in speculative philosophy, art theory, and contemporary art production, she develops a critical reading of visual and textual sources to examine the entanglements of art and visual culture, local history, poetry, and medicine. She also combines Critical Plant Studies and the aesthetics of knowledge to show how flowers, grasses, and other plants actively construct their own existences as figures of knowledge. Using as case studies two albums of paintings from the collection of the Museum of Asian Art in Berlin, Juliane Noth argues that plants have come to play a significant role in understanding cultural entanglements as well as colonial power relations in relation to natural resources. She shows that plants are agents different from the destructive rationality of the Anthropocene. As transformed agents removed from their natural habitat, i.e., as *pieces of art*, they are projected into new contexts by artists and viewers, and their image is transformed by and embedded in cultural practices. In conclusion, she argues that flowers (and other plants) are figures of knowledge in these very cultural contexts, shaping and being shaped by cultures and infrastructures of knowledge.

Juliane Noth, Viola König, and Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz point out in their chapters that in order to reconstruct and understand the complex trajectories of objects and media, as well as the changes in their status and the provenance of collections today, a range of information and sources must be linked. They therefore address the methodological challenges that researchers and curators must face if they are to unravel, decipher, and understand these intertwined trajectories in retrospect. It means reconnecting objects, media, documents, and other sources that have been scattered across very different knowledge infrastructures. This requires specific investments and cross-border efforts, bridging institutions, places, and different types of knowledge.

In the last chapter (10), Quoc-Tan Tran delves into the “machine room” of a collecting institution by analysing processes, practices, and related epistemologies at the Museum of European Cultures in Berlin. At the core of a museum’s knowledge production and information architecture are often long-established sets of conventions, processes, and practices. They underpin the institution’s connective capacities, both internally and externally. Quoc-Tan Tran describes the outcomes of digital transformation for improving access to collections, communication, and global connectivity. He focuses on entangled museum settings, considering the local constraints in museum environments that are expected to reveal hidden assumptions, evaluate hierarchies, and develop museum knowledge systems. Quoc-Tan Tran discusses different types of object documentation to anticipate future documentation designs and increase the reliability of the digital infrastructure, from index cards to integrated collection documentation systems to a centralised online catalogue. He examines how infrastructures enable and shape, but also constrain, access to, and circulation of knowledge and objects. Given their air of technical neutrality, knowledge infrastructures often slip into the unexamined background of other activities (Larkin 2013). To foreground the politics inscribed in them, Quoc-Tan Tran’s study focuses on practices of “infrastructuring”—the ongoing production of dynamic socio-technical forms that have the potential to transform social, cultural, and political relations (Anand, Gupta and Appel 2018).

In this part of the book, collecting institutions such as museums, libraries, or archives are understood as knowledge infrastructures that reflect specific epistemic cultures (Edwards 2010; Knorr-Cetina 1999). As material-semiotic assemblages of objects, technologies, procedures, ideas, discourses, and people, they configure the organisation of collections and related knowledge practices (Star and Ruhleder 1996, 113). Accordingly, the chapters examine the impact of the often-overlooked classificatory conventions, technical standards, managerial logics, and legal frameworks that are inscribed in the everyday work of collecting institutions (Bowker and Star 2000; Harrison, Byrne and Clarke 2013; Bennett et al. 2017). In addition, they highlight the intertwined histories of the objects and media and the collections in question, analysing their contexts of origin, appropriation, circulation, and disconnection in the contemporary world.

Conclusion

Taken together, the chapters in this volume demonstrate that anthropological and global art collections are an important starting point for understanding different kinds of relationships—between objects and media; the individuals and communities who made, owned, and used them; the curators, researchers, artists, activists, and authorities who engage with them; and the wider institutional, spiritual, and natural environments and infrastructures in which all these relationships are embedded. These relationships have

grown historically; they are the result of colonial and postcolonial forces, geopolitical power relations, and hierarchies of knowledge. At the same time, these relationships are contested today in unprecedented ways: with ongoing debates about the rights of Indigenous communities, struggles by diaspora and minority groups for greater visibility and recognition in society, and discussions about the possibilities and impossibilities of the decolonisation of collecting institutions. As such, the relationships between all these different kinds of human and non-human actors can no longer be taken for granted.

The chapters in our volume offer new ethnographic insights into the multiple social and cultural dynamics that the ongoing contestations of these relationships imply for possible reconfigurations of belonging, cultural heritage, and knowledge infrastructures. They also provide entry points for imagining alternative ways of dealing with objects and media, and for rethinking and reconstructing these relationships and the (re-) positioning of collections and collecting institutions more generally.

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Notes

- 1 In this text, the terms “Global North” or “Global South” do not refer to the geographical location of individual countries or regions, but to their position of privilege or marginalization and/or dominance or dependence in the global context.
- 2 Depending on the respective disciplinary tradition, archaeology has also been understood as an integral part of anthropology.
- 3 On the continuing effects of this epistemic violence until today, see Tolia-Kelly (2016, 897).
- 4 In this introduction, we use the categorisation “anthropological” and “global art” collections descriptively to point out the institutional and disciplinary contexts within which collections were assembled and are displayed until today. At the same time, we are aware that the (predominantly Western) hierarchies of (global, “modern”) art versus (local, “traditional”) craft objects are highly problematic (Macdonald 2020; Modest 2020, 73) and need to be challenged, e.g., by a decolonial approach to material and immaterial collections (see also Appadurai 2020, 45–46). In the following, we therefore leave “collections” often unspecified to accommodate

both the diversity of the collections (and the collecting institutions hosting them, which include libraries, archives, and museums) discussed in this volume as well as the diverse engagements of curators, artists, activists, and audiences with these collections within and beyond these various institutional settings.

- 5 Apart from the term “community of origin”, the terms “source community” and “originating community” (Peers and Brown 2003, 2), as well as “creator community” (Byrne et al. 2011, 8) and “communities of implication” (Lehrer 2020), are used to describe both the groups from which objects were originally taken and their descendants. While the terms acknowledge the objects’ role in the formation of group identities, they also tend to homogenise diverging interests among members of these so-called “communities” and essentialise “original contexts” (Förster 2018, 18). In the following, the terms “communities” and “contexts of origin” refer therefore to the broad spectrum of institutions, organisations, and social groups within the settings from which objects and media originate, which might also be involved in disputes over artefacts or collections.
- 6 Our own editing and writing collaboration is situated within the context of the Research Campus Dahlem (*Forschungscampus Dahlem*), which is based on long-term cooperation between Freie Universität Berlin and Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz in research, teaching, and the co-organisation of events (e.g., the annual Berlin Southern Theory Lecture co-organised by the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at Freie Universität Berlin and Leibniz Zentrum Moderner Orient: www.polsoz.fu-berlin.de/ethnologie/forschung/Southern_Theory_Lecture/index.html, accessed on: 26 September 2023 as well as several other collaborative research projects).

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Part I

Politics of Identity and Belonging



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1 Shared Soundscapes

Everyday Archiving and the Collaborative (Re)activation of Anthropological Collections

Ingrid Kummels and Gisela Cánepa Koch

Introduction (Co-Written)

In September 2021, we embarked on a collaborative project with local communities of the Peruvian Northern Coast and Central Rainforest.¹ “Shared Soundscapes. Music Revivals and Identity Politics in Peru” is designed for collaboration on several levels with the aim of learning more about ongoing music and dance revitalisation in Peru. As anthropologists engaging in a binational project between Peru and Germany, we are focusing on the challenges of collaboratively (re)activating historical recordings of oratory, music, and dance of a private university archive (the Institute of Ethnomusicology in Lima) and an individual archive (of the German anthropologist Manfred Schäfer) and supporting the communities involved to either further shape or launch their own local archives.

In our project, we broadly frame the term “archive” to refer to sites ranging from buildings and embodied repertoires to virtual spaces “where historical records are kept.” Recordkeeping is carried out by various actors and collectivities—individuals, communities, or the state—that regard these activities as especially valuable for economic and political goals such as the declaration of cultural repertoires as intangible heritage of the nation or its promotion in the tourist market (Northern Coast) or demands for land rights, natural resources, and infrastructure vis-à-vis the Peruvian state (Central Rainforest). These archivists may belong to the collectivities in question or may be external to them. They engage in keeping such records since they consider them to be key to conveying identity claims to a wider audience and repositioning the respective regions within the Peruvian nation. Oratory, music, and dance have been created by peoples who assert a Muchik, or Quechua descent (Northern Coast) and who identify as Asháninka or Nomatsigenga (Central Rainforest). We acknowledge oral tradition, arts and crafts, dance, and music as community-specific archival practices of “everyday archiving”; that is, these activities are integrated into daily life through regular practice and not limited to specialised academic interests. This also applies to community members’ current use of

digital technology for retrieving and reviving musical repertoires based on mobile phone recordings, as well as for disseminating them through social media.

The classic works on the subject focused on archives created by the state and critiqued this important site of political control (Foucault 1969; Derrida 1995; Mbembe 2002; Stoler 2009). Our research explores how multiple archival practices and pathways are at work simultaneously (Gilliland, McKemmish and Law 2017). For example, local people of the Northern Coast have long engaged in the collection of archaeological pieces, and in their sale or exhibition in museums, as well as in the use of visual sources to discuss the origin of music, dances, and instruments. Asháninka and Nomatsigena peoples of the Central Rainforest practice their own archival techniques: oral history and the resinging of historical chants, which today they combine with the use of mobile phone technology.

However, a distance has been produced between “true” and “spurious” archiving that is connected to how sound has been collected and archived in the field of ethnomusicology (Lewy 2020). Simply put, “true” archiving has long been attributed to universal theories on music, “advanced” recording techniques, and academically trained experts who were external to the local communities. Therefore, research archives have been flawed by the spatial, temporal, and epistemological distances that separated them from the communities where oratory, music, and dance recording were collected.

Our key concept of shared soundscapes instead allows for the recognition of both the distances as well as the plurality of knowledge created by ongoing archival processes with regard to oratory, music, and dance. When focusing on “sound,” we advocate that its material and immaterial aspects cannot be separated. Furthermore, we recognise soundscapes as uneven arenas of negotiation shaped by social hierarchies and forms of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, class, and gender; that is, archival agency and expertise are granted in differential terms with regard to representation and access within an archive.

As to the respective dynamics now underway in the soundscapes of Lambayeque (Northern Coast) and Matereni (Central Rainforest), we propose that they are linked to:

- a) a web of actors, in addition to instrumentalists and vocalists, such as cultural entrepreneurs, political leaders, and teachers as grassroots researchers and anthropologists with diverse interests; all these actors currently engage in institutional or individual archival endeavors
- b) Peruvian state policies that declare certain music and dance genres to be the heritage of a culturally diverse nation and encourage their recognition in particular regions, while in other regions there is less emphasis on culture in favor of a focus on environmental exploitation

- c) local appropriation of the technology involved in producing, consuming, and presenting music and dance, above all digitalization and social media, which was intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this article, we will show how individual stakeholders—both external researchers as well as local experts who may become collaborators and co-researchers in the endeavour to return sound recordings—are driven by particular motivations. We concentrate on entrepreneurial curators (Northern Coast) and grassroots researchers/sonic activists (Central Rainforest) as key actors who engage creatively in archival processes and promote dialogue and collaboration between the various archives. The multiple fissures within soundscapes offer diversified points of departure for collaborative archiving. We tackle the question of how a web of actors can be developed in the first place and propose that it is crucial to recognise and include people already engaged in archiving sonic traditions. Our collaborative methodology relies on diversifying spaces of dialogue and exchange with regard to sound, that is, expanding existing soundscapes in order to level hierarchies of class, race, and gender. We therefore intervene by arranging home visits, a widespread form of socialising and source of entertainment on the Northern Coast, or by adopting the everyday archiving practiced at *masato* gatherings when circulating historical recordings (Central Rainforest); a workshop at the Institute of Ethnomusicology in Lima which was carried out from 14 November 2022 to 17 November 2022 had been designed to strengthen the exchange between the collaborators of both subprojects and with this university archive. In the following section, we explore hierarchies and ways of levelling them by analysing archiving agencies within diverse soundscapes embedded in larger political and economic contexts.

The Northern Coast: Cultural Heritage and Everyday Archiving (Gisela Cánepa Koch)

Music and Dance in Lambayeque: Identity Politics, Heritage, and Cultural Entrepreneurs

In 1987, the discovery of the grave of the *Señor de Sipán*, an ancient Muchik ruler from the 3rd century CE in the department of Lambayeque, transformed the archaeological and ethnographic imaginaries of the Peruvian Northern Coast. The importance of the archaeological legacy of the Muchik culture resonated with local identity narratives and anthropological theories. One year later, Richard Schaedel, a North American anthropologist and advocate of Muchik identity, published *La etnografía Muchik en las fotografías de H.Brüning 1886–1925*. Analysing Brüning's photographs as material and visual evidence of cultural continuity, Schaedel (1988) was drawing on his argument according to which contemporary rural communities of Lambayeque would be the heirs of the ancient Muchik.²

Schaedel was also constructing an anthropological argument that served to sustain Muchik identity politics (Cánepa 2016). He and other anthropologists and schoolteachers such as Victorino Túllume, Victor Rodríguez Suy, and James Vreeland, helped shape an “anthropological Muchik identity” that differed from the one envisioned by archaeologists (Asensio 2014). These anthropologists supported ethnopolitical demands and the economic self-sustainability of rural communities. They further encouraged ethnographic research and documentation of endangered forms of knowledge and expressive culture to ensure the transmission of Muchik culture and knowledge, whereby music and dance play an important role.

Although several musical genres and instruments are of colonial origin and Spanish and African influences, they had been adapted to agricultural and life cycles and played a role in reproducing social ties. Supported by folklore theories and authenticity arguments, they were associated with rural communities that were granted the status of bearers of Muchik heritage.

Political and economic crises, as well as accelerated urbanisation processes, threatened the continuity of a number of cultural forms of knowledge and expression. This included ancestral irrigation technologies, the cultivation of native cotton, the braiding of straw hats, the spinning and weaving of cotton threads, and musical genres and dances performed in the context of religious festivities and domestic celebrations and rituals. The *Danza de los Diablicos* of Túcume,³ performed for the festival of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, lacked the allure of the past or faced extinction. The same fate befell musical instruments like the *chirmía* that accompanies the *Diablico dance* and the harp.⁴ The sonority of the *banda norteña*, composed of brass and percussion instruments, had gained prominence, and co-opted the soundscape in the region. Its adaptability to play all genres, to perform in processional parades in festive contexts, and its media consumption explain its popularity.

Later, in the context of neoliberal reforms implemented by the government of Alberto Fujimori (1990–2001), identity politics and the uses of culture came under a new regime governed by ideas of productivity and participation. Under UNESCO guidelines, the progressive standardisation of the processes to nominate cultural repertoires as national heritages were at the core of cultural policies promoted by government institutions such as PromPerú (The Commission for the Promotion of Peruvian Exports and Tourism) and the Dirección General de Patrimonio Cultural (General Directorate of Cultural Heritage). Nation-branding campaigns played a central role in making economic growth and insertion in the global market a matter of public interest. Slogans such as “Peru is a great brand, and we are all invited to be its ambassadors,”⁵ framed citizen participation not only as a condition for the nation’s success but also as a moral duty. An emerging celebratory national narrative became the norm, and expressions such as “Sí se puede” (Yes, we can) were spread in a variety of public spheres. The economic boom of the

first decade of the 21st century was attributed to the entrepreneurial nature of Peruvians. A large, marginalised portion of the population reacted enthusiastically and embraced the call to perform as entrepreneurs, while challenging historical inequality and discrimination based on class, race, and ethnicity. In this emerging regime, the Peruvian citizen is fashioned as a cultural entrepreneur.

Turning Lambayeque into a tourist destination and encouraging the productivity of cultural repertoires reshaped former identity politics. The performance, everyday archiving, and dissemination of dance and music repertoires came under the regulation of cultural heritage policies and of branding strategies, giving rise to new archival agencies and practices. These are the coordinates under which we are carrying out the Shared Soundscapes project.

The Lambayeque Collection: Past and Present Collaborations

The Lambayeque collection gathers field recordings assembled during an 1-year period (1990–1991)⁶ as part of a larger music and dance documentation and preservation project funded by the Ford Foundation (1985–2000). It belongs to the archive of the Institute of Ethnomusicology (IDE) at Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP), which holds the most extensive archive of traditional and popular music in Peru.⁷ As part of a university archive, these materials have gone through a process of cataloguing, preservation, digitisation, and dissemination. The IDE fieldwork team, which I was part of, followed ethnographic methods of documentation and a rationale of cultural preservation, recording music and dances in their context of interpretation, portraying performances from beginning to end, and prioritising endangered musical genres and dances.

James Vreeland, a student of Schaedel who began documenting endangered music and dances as early as 1986, collected instruments that had fallen into disuse and organised stage performances and contests. He also provided the IDE team with information and contacts. The Lambayeque collection was shaped in line with Vreeland's advocacy for Muchik identity and the IDE's cultural preservation objectives. The narrative of the documentary *Musical Instruments and Genres of Lambayeque* (Serie Videos Etnográficos 1994), which I had produced for the Ethnographic Videos of the IDE series, highlighted the threats posed to the continuity of the *Diablicos* and the *chirimía*, and featured Don Victorino Acosta as the last *chirimía* player. Some of the scenes in the documentary were filmed at the suggestion of Don Victorino Acosta, who was concerned to leave a testimony of his musical legacy, as when he invited the IDE field team to his home to record him playing the *chirimía* and Fermín Rojas Colina on the drums (Figure 1.1).

Almost two decades later, researchers of the site museum of Túcume, municipal authorities and the gatekeepers of the *Danza de los Diablicos de*



Figure 1.1 IDE field team recording Victorino Acosta (*chirimía*) and Fermín Rojas Colina (drum) Lambayeque, 1991. © Photo by Raúl R. Romero.

Túcume presented a heritage bill proposal for the nomination of the dance as a national heritage.⁸ The experts from the museum complemented the research dossier by including archival materials like Brüning's photograph collection that depicted the dance in 1904. The process also involved the participation of cultural entrepreneurs such as Martín Granados. He joined the *Diablicos* troupe as a child to fulfil a promise to the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception. Today, he is the head of the dance and a renowned artisanal mask maker. By drawing on his management skills and social media proficiency, he further promoted the dance through everyday archiving and dissemination via Facebook, reaching new audiences inside and outside the community.

Sometime before the Shared Soundscape project was envisioned, Martín accessed the IDE's documentary *Musical Instruments and Genres of Lambayeque* through YouTube. In our first meeting, during a visit to Túcume in 2019, Martín recognised me as soon as he heard my voice. Thereupon, when he introduced me to dancers or musicians, he stressed with complicity "I recognized her by her voice, from the documentary I had watched so many times," evoking the fact that the IDE recordings mediate a significant relation between us. By means of the documentary, I had become a remote presence in Túcume's soundscape that allowed for a collaboration we had not been aware of. Travelling through space and time, some of the materials of the Lambayeque collection served new local actors in their response to new challenges and the weaving of old and new relations.

Activating Historical Photographs and Collaborations: Entrepreneurial Curators and Archival Inequalities

Intervening in the regional soundscape through everyday archiving such as recording and collecting music, dance, and instruments can be seen as inscribed in a wider collecting and exhibiting tradition in Northern Peru. These practices might include the collecting of archaeological pieces and their exhibition in museums, but also the use of visual sources, material culture, and life performances to discuss the origin and identity of music and dances.⁹ Today, they involve archival and curatorial agencies that take place on digital platforms such as Facebook, and are crucial for cultural revitalisation and identity politics (Cánepa 2016). As part of these wider scenarios, Martín engaged in everyday archival and curatorial practices, making use of Brüning's photographs, the IDE documentary, and his own recordings made with his mobile phone. With those materials, he developed historical accounts and authenticity arguments on the *Diablicos*, consolidating his leadership in cultural revitalisation and entrepreneurship initiatives. He devoted himself to the teaching of the dance to new generations, and to recuperating and innovating the techniques to manufacture the tin mask for its use in the dance and its introduction in the artisan market. He imported two *chirimías* from Spain in order to have the proper musical accompaniment for the *Diablicos*. Through his studio *Taller Artesanal Diablicos de Túcume* (Diablicos de Túcume Handicraft Workshop), he offers products, services, and expert knowledge related to the dance. In contrast to the cultural promoters in the 1990s, Martín operates using the logic of the cultural entrepreneur. He simultaneously makes use of heritage to express religious devotion, strengthen cultural repertoires, achieve personal benefit, and accomplish his duty as a citizen who is committed to Lambayeque's development.

Cultural revitalisation initiatives and everyday archiving shape Martín's "ability to discern value within objects" (O'Neil 2017, 17), casting him as a "citizen curator" (Jackson 2020) of Túcume's cultural heritage. Given that his curatorial expertise requires the mastering of archival practices, digital technologies, and business management skills, and that aspirations for civic recognition and economic success come into play, I envision Martín as an entrepreneurial archivist and curator. He has not been commissioned by any archival institution, museum, or researcher, but performs as an entrepreneurial archivist and curator in his own right. I am compelled to recognise him as an "epistemic partner" (Marcus 2007, 1132), as he is a voice of authority that interprets and creates knowledge vis-à-vis researchers and curators of the site museum of Túcume or the IDE archive.

During a workshop organised by Ingrid Kummels and myself in 2019, Martín Granados was invited to visit the IDE and see the collection for the first time. He quickly realised that his access to it via the documentary on YouTube had been limited. He also became more self-conscious about his own role as an archivist and curator of Lambayeque's soundscape.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, he was active in curating materials for dissemination through his Facebook page, helping to keep the dance alive since, due to “social distancing” restrictions, it could not be performed. He also used the Internet to sell products such as T-shirts, mugs, and face masks with designs that feature the *Diablicos*. When the Shared Soundscape team began fieldwork in 2022, Martín facilitated encounters with dancers and the few existing performers of the *chirimía* in the form of home visits—a widespread form of social gathering and entertainment in Lambayeque—just as Vreeland had done three decades earlier. Unlike Vreeland, however, Martín dedicated himself to recording these encounters with his own camera. He also depicted us as we documented how the photos and audios we shared were received by dancers and musicians. In other words, the very activation of the Lambayeque collection has become a matter of archival interest for the project team and for Martín. This is quite revealing, as it shed lights on the contested and reflexive character that archival agency takes on while we collaborate.

Martín accompanied us to the meetings he mediated, one of which gathered a group of young dancers to comment on some historical photographs of the *Diablicos* that we had selected for the occasion. Elder relatives and acquaintances who had danced in the past or are still dancing were recognised. Costumes, masks, and ways of dancing today were compared with those depicted in the photos. Parallel to this work of interpretation and knowledge production, they performed their archival agency by taking out their mobile phones to select, register, and archive the photos that most interested them; either to make memories or to position themselves in the genealogy of the dance. Access to the contents of the Lambayeque collection ceased to be the prerogative of Martín who had had the opportunity to visit the IDE before. The everyday archival and curatorial practices generated by the elicitation of this photographic material challenged Martín’s position as head of the dance, as an entrepreneur archivist and curator and as our collaborator. As the young dancers enthusiastically deployed their archival agency, Martín pointed out that the photos they were taking with their mobile phones should be kept in reserve. He stated: “You must be careful and not share the photos on Facebook or Instagram, because they belong to the university archive.” While he shared his knowledge on archival conventions with the younger dancers, he legitimised his leading position regarding the revitalisation and safeguarding of the dance and his role as a collaborator with the project (Figure 1.2).

Our collaborations as epistemic partners are not without tension, nor are the various archival and curatorial agencies within the community. The declaration of the *Danza de los Diablicos* of Túcume as national heritage transformed the ownership regime of the dance. Having for decades been a tradition managed and transmitted privately by the Carrillo family, it turned into a national public good, challenging the family’s authority and control over the dance. The advanced age of the Carrillo family members who lead



Figure 1.2 Martín Granados and young *Diablico* dancers in a photo elicitation session of the Lambayeque collection. Lambayeque, 2022. © Photo by Gisela Cánepa Koch.

the dance, their limited access to digital technology and lack of competences in digital literacy diminished their possibilities of maintaining their former leadership, losing prominence to Martín when it came to *Diablicos* affairs.

Heritagisation policies and digital transformation are challenging the effectiveness of former ways of performing and everyday archiving of heritage expressions for the purposes of their transmission and validity, while generating inequalities based on class and generation within the Lambayeque soundscape. The challenge of activating the Lambayeque collection lies in reflexively mediating the multiple existing tensions; those generated by ongoing social processes and those generated by activation itself.

The Central Rainforest: Politics of Innovation and Everyday Archiving (Ingrid Kummels)

Asháninka and Nomatsigenga Music and Dance in Flux

Tres Unidos de Matereni in the Central Rainforest is a *Comunidad Nativa* of Asháninka and Nomatsigenga peoples which has undergone enormous changes in recent decades. The scattered households of Asháninka and Nomatsigenga combined subsistence and cash crop agriculture, along with hunting, fishing, and gathering in the western Ene River basin. They faced imminent threats of land grabs by Andean settlers who had migrated to this region at the invitation of Peruvian president Fernando Belaúnde Terry (1980–1985). Alleging that the country's rainforest areas were still largely uninhabited and untapped, the government enforced the external exploitation of their resources, such as via hydropower, as a solution to the nation's economic problems.

The Asháninka and Nomatsigenga joined forces in the basin area and founded Matereni as a novel central settlement for the purpose of obtaining a land title grant offered by the leftist Velasco administration's land reform. As founder Cesario Chiricente (1981), an Asháninka, declared on tape to the German anthropologist Manfred Schäfer in March 1981:

We went to Lima to demand a land title, but the government asserted that it could not concede it and would parcel our land. But we reject a parceling out; we insist on retaining the whole land surveyed as our territory, as our property, so that we can live in peace.

An essential part of "living in peace" was resistance to serving as bonded labour for settlers—an experience Cesario himself had suffered. When he became Matereni's chief, he effectively turned the tables by growing coffee on his own and incentivising others to follow his example. Oratory, music, and dance—vital components of sociality, economy, religion, and politics—were harnessed to establish alliances between the dispersed households. Matereni began to regularly celebrate festivities at large *masato* gatherings to reinforce claims to an envisaged *Comunidad Nativa*. Music was played with a *sonkari* (a pan-flute with five pipes) or a *tampo* (drum), *matikantsi* were chanted by men, *maninkerentsi* sung by women dancing in a row, and both would perform love songs called *amampaantsi*. These original genres have a cosmogonical dimension that contradicted the government assertion that the rainforest was a "deserted natural space" in need of settlement. Chants recorded back then like "Tareto" (brownish bird), "Keniri" (red howler monkey), and "Maniti" (tiger) were about animals who are in fact humans and humans who at any moment can be transformed into animals; they reflected on a fluid human/animal/nature relationship. Political leaders like Cesario were adept as orators, vocalists, and instrumentalists and used their skills to reinforce Asháninka and Nomatsigenga ethnic identities in close relationship to a communal territory. By the early 1980s, autochthonous genres at festivities were combined with Andean *huayno* and popular *chicha* music from a record player.¹⁰

Subsequent watershed moments of this *Comunidad Nativa* show how Asháninka and Nomatsigenga relied on speeches, songs, and the playing of music to maintain their independence from the market-oriented settler economy. Although Matereni participated in cash crop cultivation, its labour relationships were organised in communal ways which fostered greater equality. After having resisted attacks by Sendero Luminoso in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, the community granted a private company a concession to exploit timber. It used the earnings to improve their basic community infrastructure like schools, which had been denied to them by the state. To date, settlers are not allowed to live in Matereni and outside merchants are only tolerated on a temporary basis. The community leaders who succeeded Cesario launched their own music and dance initiatives. In 1998, the initial

earnings from logging were invested in a novel celebration: An ensemble from the district capital known for playing popular Amazonian *chichas* was contracted to perform. Since then, the community has converted what they had once been able to hear only on record or cassette into a live event.

Recently, Asháninka and Nomatsigenga teachers have sought to revitalise *sonkari* music and traditional singing and dancing at festivities—now often called “*música ancestral*.” At this point, it is important to clarify that “*reactivación*” and “*ancestralidad*” are imbued with the spirit of innovation: Those who use these labels seek to advance current interests when selecting from history what they deem worth revitalising. In the case of Matereni, “ancestral music” serves as a strategy to emphasise special rights as a “native (Indigenous) community.” This coexists with other trends such as the tendency of community leaders (in Asháninka and Nomatsigenga: *pinkatsari*) to proclaim an outspoken spirit of innovation—as evidenced by their eager adoption of new music and technology. Both positions tie in with the community’s demands vis-à-vis the Peruvian state for badly needed infrastructure, such as Internet connectivity, to support an adequate standard of living.

The Individual Archive and its Distinctive Agencies

The main source of recorded historical music and dance of Matereni is the archive created by Manfred Schäfer (1949–2003) which is kept by me, Ingrid Kummels.¹¹ Particularly in the years before the land title was granted (1983), Schäfer engaged as a “sonic activist”: He intervened in Matereni’s soundscapes by recording with a reel-to-reel or a cassette device. In the Peruvian and German national public spheres, he created radio programmes and TV features that relied on audio recordings to convey the political demands of rainforest peoples in their own voices. This German anthropologist can be characterised as a professional photographer and filmmaker as well as an activist. He was motivated to build not only a collection, but an activist archive so that the rainforest peoples could obtain land titles. Thus, he organised and classified most of his documents in order to disseminate them in his creative work, advocating for their sustainable way of life and their need for vast amounts of land. He also freely shared features and photographs with German and Peruvian activists, Indigenous organisations such as AIDSESP, as well as with the communities themselves. During his lifetime, he probably had no intention of transferring his many sound recordings to a research archive; maintaining control over his archive was essential to disseminating images that showed the future-oriented lifeways of rainforest peoples. He combined environmental engagement with an action anthropology approach in supporting Tres Unidos de Matereni’s land title; his activities have therefore become part of the local history (Kummels 2016). Because of their significance to the political issues at stake, he experimented with a collaborative approach in co-producing lengthy recordings with Matereni’s inhabitants.

The reel-to-reel (tapes) and cassette tapes recorded between 1978 and 1981 encompass the diverse soundscapes of festivities, of narrating historical accounts, singing evangelical songs, and of shamanic chanting. Unravelling the co-production of these historical soundscapes would not be possible without a collaborative approach to archival reactivation in the present. As translated to me by his son Simón, in the breaks, Cesario would comment on music's role within cosmology. Addressing both the tape recorder and the community gathered before him, he highlighted how the complementary performances of women singing and men playing *sonkari* serve in worshipping manioc, their staple food. He mobilised them by playing *sonkari* himself and thinking aloud as to how this future remembrance could be accomplished given the limited duration of the tape and batteries. Thus, by adopting the latest sound technology to create dense soundscapes, Cesario as a *pinkatsari* acted as a grassroots researcher: he combined traditional archival techniques such as moderating and performing music with the use of imported audio technology (Figure 1.3).

Another example are the lengthy, non-stop recording sessions that took place in the household of Shenkari, then a legendary Nomatsigenga aya-huasca shaman (*sheripiari*) of roughly 80 years of age. User-friendly cassettes allowed for longer recordings without having to worry about economising.



Figure 1.3 Cesario Chiricente moderating at a community celebration during a recording session; in the middle, Manfred Schäfer. © Ingrid Kummels/ Photo by Oscar Gutiérrez, November 1978.

Source: La Casa-Archivo/Ingrid Kummels.

Therefore, these recordings captured all sound in the household: casual conversations that took place between songs, laughter, drinking *masato*, and burping; as well as lulls in the conversation which allow us to hear the crickets and birds. They include Shenkari's explanations of his shamanic songs and conversations with Manfred and the *pinkatsari* Pablo Mahuanca, who would translate into Spanish.

In sum, given the agencies of different record-keeping systems, as well as those of the respective web of actors, various historical soundscapes emerge from today's perspective. They attest to the way political and religious leaders (*pinkatsari* and *sheripiari*) relied on oratory and musical expertise to shape historical soundscapes and propel them into the future. The village chief's moderation and the shaman's remarks are one of these agencies which reflects on imported technology, commenting on how innovation was harnessed to increase the density of the soundscape. These recordings differ from materials collected in university archives from the same period in several ways; for example, they do not suppress archival agencies to convey a "purely traditional" Asháninka and Nomatsigenga event. These characteristics motivate political leaders and teachers in Matereni today to pick up the discussion and renew the role of original Asháninka and Nomatsigenga oratory, music, and dance for collective identity as a *Comunidad Nativa*.

Current Soundscapes for Reactivation of Historical Audio Recordings

Since 2014, I have assumed a role I would characterise as acting as an intermediary or "temporal bridge," since I have been the main person disseminating the historical audio recordings to people in Matereni.¹² I did so fully aware of the fact that returning historical recordings diverges from any simple "bringing back of the original music." On the contrary, "the return of music to circulation in communities where it has been unavailable as a result of external power differences" is a result of "differential access to wealth and technology, educational training..." (Seeger 2019, 2). Having suffered from these disadvantages, the people of Matereni are now enormously interested in using digital tools to reactivate what they consider part of their local history of sound innovation. Therefore, community members engage in this complex process of returning historical recordings into circulation—and I have inadvertently become a sonic activist myself.

During one of my visits to Matereni in November and December 2021, its inhabitants let me partake in their everyday memory and archiving practices once again. When gathering and drinking *masato*, a lightly alcoholic beer made from manioc, Asháninka and Nomatsigenga put their own values into practice; the logics of sharing and exchanging at the gatherings are basic for sociality (Killick 2009), the techniques of storytelling, chanting, and crafting artefacts are combined to generate knowledge (Hugh-Jones 2016). The exchange of views at such drinking parties includes careful listening to each other's expertise on everyday archiving in a respectful way (Powell 2019).



Figure 1.4 Translating an interview in Asháninka on historical music and dance with descendants of Cesario and Shenkari. © Photo by Ingrid Kummels, November 2021.

The audio recordings that I had brought with me were always discussed in this open, noisy, and joyous atmosphere accessible to anyone—never in the privacy of a closed office. This was also the case when translating an interview in Asháninka on historical music and dance with community members (Figure 1.4).

During this visit to Matereni at the end of 2021, the dynamics resulting from government construction of roads, bridges, and houses in the middle of the COVID-19 crisis were overwhelming. The state was suddenly fulfilling what the community had urged for decades, but community members were struggling to ensure that “development” was implemented on their own terms. Just recently, limited Internet connections have become available for children’s homeschooling. New sounds invaded the community’s soundscapes via the programs of mass media like satellite TV, which rarely include Asháninka and Nomatsigenga news or cultural expressions. It is against this background that existing memory techniques were being incorporated into inquiry, documentation, and archiving with one’s own mobile phone. Grassroots digital research via these tools had started to take off.

An example of how people have different memories (or lack of memories) of 1980s Asháninka and Nomatsigenga culture, depending on their generation, is 40-year-old Simón. He was supervising the logistics for the construction of

bridges for the municipality of Pangoa. Despite a backbreaking workload, he dedicated several evenings to commenting on the more than 70 recordings of shaman Shenkari; these songs derive their power from ayahuasca journeys throughout Amazonia, as evidenced in their description of landscapes, peoples, flora, fauna, and climate. He hosted a *masato* gathering where we could share the recordings. Here, I emphasise the methodology he used. He sang the songs again in his own version and brought them back to life in the present soundscape, a way of forging his Asháninka Nomatisiguenga identity in the face of unequal structures of power. Both of us would record this archival reactivation with our mobile phones; we own the same upper-price range model. Reactivation therefore meant entwining our resources to this end. Simón added meaning to the comments Shenkari had made in 1980, interpreting them in the context of our current listening session:

With regard to this song he [Shenkari] is explaining: “Many young people are not interested in the songs I have created. But I go on singing as much as I can and the few people who are in fact interested will carry on with them. Sooner or later they *will* remember them.” ...Now he’s saying: “Ingrid is here, so in 50 years they will remember me even if I am not existing anymore.”

(Simón, Matereni, December 2, 2021)

In contrast to Simón, Elí, a kindergarten teacher in his 30s, never experienced shamanic healing by Shenkari or festivities with exclusively original genres. He promotes cultural *reactivación* by staging music and dance at school celebrations. During their training at the Ministry of Education, teachers are instructed in a canon of folkloric dances to be taught to students; these include *The Dance of the Fish* (attributed to the Shipibo) and *The Dance of Santiago* (attributed to the Andes in general). This mixture is dubbed *interculturalidad*, in the sense that it conveys all Peruvian cultures according to the conventional tripartite division of Coast, Sierra, and Rainforest. Elí, however, sensed a complete omission of Matereni’s traditions in the canon, and was absorbed in their recreation by resorting to the digitalised tapes. When listening to the recordings of Shenkari’s songs, he did not resing them as Simón did. Instead, he complemented them with his own songs. As he explained:

We teachers are not ashamed of speaking in our language. I always use the original language at work; I sing in Asháninka, adapting to the rhythm of my pupils. ... I am teaching them the song “Naro jananike kirianiki,” “I as a youngster will defend my community/people some day.” I never forget my identity and wear my *cushma* (original tunic). I maintain my identity anywhere, I am Asháninka. ... That’s why I created that song, since as teachers we are intellectuals and have talent!

(Elí, Matereni, 1.12.21)

In sum, depending on generation and the resources they have at hand, teachers and community leaders act as grassroots researchers; they anchor their everyday archival practices in social gatherings where manioc beer is consumed, in a place where sharing prevails and access is available to anyone. Inequalities do exist within this soundscape since participants differ in terms of literacy, income, and cultural knowledge. Nevertheless, it is here that experts such as *pinkatsari* and teachers experiment with sonic interventions, including the reactivation of historical recordings, using digital technology as they share and legitimise their expertise in the presence of other villagers. Cultural and political demands, rather than entrepreneurial ambition, motivate them to assert and reinforce Asháninka and Nomatsigena identities in creative, popular, and timely ways.

An Interim Balance: Everyday Archiving and Its Relevance for Identity Formation (Co-Written)

We assume oratory, music, and dance to be crucial for the processes shaping local identities on different levels and for local actors who advance their cultural and political agendas. To elucidate this role of sound, we engaged in case studies in two different regions: the Northern Coast (the Lambayeque region) and the Central Rainforest (the *Comunidad Nativa Matereni*). Both display divergent characteristics with regard to cultural revitalisation and identity politics. One of our project's goals is to reach a critical and comparative interpretation of the (re)activation of two archives, an individual and a university one. We understand archival (re)activation as first requiring the identification, and then the expansion of soundscapes as spaces for exchange and reflexivity in which various actors intervene and introduce their archival practices. For this reason, we have explored the broader cultural and political context in which soundscapes evolve, the archival and curatorial agencies that are at play, the conditions under which everyday archival practices are combined with digital technology, and the terms according to which various actors shape collaboration and access to historical archival materials.

The histories and present dynamics concerning the Northern Coast and the Central Rainforest pose a challenge when engaging in collaborative archiving. We met the challenge by first discerning how the daily practice of keeping historical records is embedded in social relationships. In concrete terms, “everyday archiving” consists of the use of archival techniques to discuss the origin of music, dances, and instruments to revitalise them, in combination with digital technology. Different approaches to daily record-keeping have been vital for establishing a variety of collective identities in both regions. On the Northern Coast, heritage policies have been enthusiastically assumed by heritage bearers, cultural promoters, and entrepreneurs to obtain recognition from the state and consolidate a distinctive identity within a multicultural nation, as well as to increase the region's value. This process entails disputes, since the heritagisation of the *Diablicos de Túcume* converts the dance into

a public good, making it susceptible to appropriation by new actors and for new purposes. Their display of distinctiveness through costumes, masks, and movements introduces a competitive rationale into the regional soundscapes. In contrast, Asháninka and Nomatsigenga of the Selva Central have adopted as well as crucially shaped the legal figure of the *Comunidad Nativa* as their territorial basis for differentiated identities and specific demands of civic participation as well as of a certain autonomy. They seek to position themselves on more autonomous terms in regards to territorial rights within the nation by insisting that their own cultural expressions be respected and heard. This applies to the Asháninka and Nomatsigenga oratory, music, and dances embedded in soundscapes that they have, so far, managed to control and therefore safeguard from possible commercialisation.

When engaging in collaborative initiatives, we started from two distinctive archives, since they were assembled either primarily for cultural preservation or for political action. However, the university and the individual archive share the common ground of having anticipated postcolonial debates in some of their respective strategic orientations. In the case of the university archive, researchers undertook initiatives that aimed at cultural preservation and the dissemination of archival materials through the publication of academic works and the curatorship of sound and audiovisual productions. This has allowed cultural entrepreneurs' incipient access to these materials (Northern Coast). In the case of the individual archive, the sonic activist Manfred Schäfer supported Amazonian Indigenous empowerment by recording speeches and songs and preserving and using the recordings to ensure the political agency of voices in contexts beyond the locality. The potential of these recordings to change the assimilative course of Peruvian national politics are being reactivated by grassroots researchers today (Central Rainforest).

Once we identified and accompanied entrepreneurial curators and grassroots researchers, we became more aware of the motivations of these key actors as well as the similarities and differences in the constitution of the university and the individual archive. In the 1980s, a concordance between the demands of cultural recognition of Muchik identity made locally and the objectives of preservation pursued by the Institute of Ethnomusicology configured the archive. Today, entrepreneurial curators respond to a multiplicity of aspirations of overlapping vindictory and entrepreneurial agendas in a complex manner. This requires reflexivity and negotiation skills from all involved to reach a common ground when (re)activating the archive. In the case of grassroots researchers, there were basic common values involved in the creation of the individual archive in the 1980s with regard to securing territory and activating the archive as a basis for Asháninka and Nomastiguenga identity. The mediator's (Ingrid Kummels) sonic activism in the 2020s is aimed at reinforcing those values under new conditions which are threatened by extractivist policies and a "development" unilaterally implemented by the state.

What can we learn from these archival processes? First, everyday archiving is about daily socialising within soundscapes that generate and recombine knowledges; it is not about academic work in an ivory tower. Second, these soundscapes harbour their own inequalities. It is no coincidence that in both case studies, we mention male everyday archivists, but this also depends on expanding our approach to women's and gender-diversified soundscapes; we are working on that. In recent years, women in the Northern Coast have been allowed to participate in the dance of the *Diablicos*, but they have not been accepted as dance experts. In the case of the Central Rainforest, our findings indicate that women exercise agency, for example, in religious, evangelical soundscapes. Third, developing regionally appropriate pathways for collaborative archival (re)activation implies adopting the actors' methodologies and combining them with those envisioned by the university and individual archives, respectively. It therefore requires time for dialogue, both on site in the field and between both subprojects. During home visits, hosts and visitors establish bonds of trust that regulate the exchange of objects, services, and knowledge under both mercantile and reciprocal principles. Music and dance are key elements of this exchange. *Masato* gatherings involve putting aside one's own timing and agendas and getting to know the interlocutor's notions of work and leisure schedules and the value attributed to serendipity.

Collaborative activation also requires negotiating with different logics regarding the extent to which cultural expressions may be commercialised or require safeguarding from commercialisation. The archives' policies and our project's stance with regard to merchandising culture calls for careful analysis. Here, it should be noted that the university archive disseminates these recordings academically at cost price for academic purposes, as well as through the university digital repository and YouTube, which are open access; the individual archive distributed its materials only to those politically aligned with the territorial demands of rainforest peoples. While on the Northern Coast, entrepreneurial curators promote and shape the dance of the *Diablicos* to add value to them both for recognition as an intangible national heritage of the nation and as a source of economic development. In the Central Rainforest, soundscapes are refashioned according to a proven non-entrepreneurial modality. Cultural and political demands for autonomy, rather than entrepreneurial ambition, motivate them to assert and reinforce Asháninka and Nomatsigenga identities. Our initiatives of collaborative activation respect these regional divergences by taking them as a point of departure in our comparative framework.

Notes

- 1 Gisela Cánepa and Walther Maradiegue focus on the Peruvian Northern Coast, Ingrid Kummels, and Rocío Barreto on the Central Rainforest. The binational anthropological project "Shared Soundscapes" is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG, by its name in German) for the period between 2021 and 2024. See also Shared Soundscapes (2023).

- 2 The German Heinrich Brüning (1848–1928) conducted archaeological, historical, and ethnographic research in turn of the century Lambayeque, gathering an important archaeological, photographic, and sound collection. The Museum am Rothenbaum. Kulturen und Künste der Welt (MARKK), the Ethnologisches Museum and the Phonogramm-Archive in Berlin, and the Museo Arqueológico Nacional Brüning in Lambayeque, Perú house are various parts of his legacy.
- 3 The dance, of colonial origin, features devils, and an angel who represent the *Auto Sacramental* of the Seven Deadly Sins. The *Diablicos de Túcume* refers to the dance troupe that belongs to Túcume, a district in the Lambayeque region.
- 4 The *chirimía* or shawm is a woodwind musical instrument, a predecessor of the oboe. It was introduced to the Americas by the Spaniards to be used in dances and for ceremonial music on the streets due to the instrument's characteristic nasal, rasping, and loud sound. In the coastal area of Lambayeque, the harp is played with the accompaniment of a drummer who rhythmically beats the body of the instrument.
- 5 The most important promotional spot of this campaign was *Perú Nebraska* (2011). See <https://youtu.be/RL9gsVy9gfU>
- 6 The Lambayeque collection consists of 393 photographs, 37 h of VHS-tape recordings, and 29 h of sound recordings.
- 7 See <https://ide.pucp.edu.pe>
- 8 The nomination was achieved in 2013.
- 9 Some of these sources might be the 18th-century illustrated chronicle of Baltasar Martínez de Compañón, the photographic collection of German scientist Hans Heinrich Brüning (1848–1928), and the recordings, instrument collection, and contest organized by Vreeland (1986–the present).
- 10 *Chicha* is a fusion of Andean *huayno* and tropical *cumbia* music played with rock instruments like electric guitars.
- 11 The individual archive contains material he recorded in the late 1970s and 1980s; much of it comes from Tres Unidos de Matereni and encompasses 15 h of sound recordings (8 h are of *sonkari*, *maninkerentsi*, *ayahuasca*, and evangelical music), more than 2000 colour slides, more than 1000 black and white negatives, 7 h of super 8 films, and 16 mm film material from this community alone. See the film, *In Green Heaven*, Kummels (2022a), and a short portrait of the archive, *My Home is my Archive*, Kummels (2022b).
- 12 The recordings were first disseminated in Matereni by Schäfer. Cassette copies and photos from the 1980s have not survived the passing time in the community, but memories persist of the spectacular festivities and their recording activities. In 2014, I returned to Matereni for the first time after 25 years and brought back materials from the individual archive, now called La Casa-Archivo (Kummels 2016).

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2 Curating and Creating Relations between Lived Worlds

A Practice-Oriented Methodology for Museum Engagements with Indigenous Communities from Amazonia

Thiago da Costa Oliveira and Andrea Scholz

Introduction

It has become common sense in Museum Anthropology that a decolonisation of ethnographic museums includes recognising that non-Western people may understand, perceive, and explain material things differently than people from the global North who have grown up within Western epistemological (including visual) regimes. In spite of this awareness, museum practice in the Global North has been slow in transforming itself accordingly, especially when it comes to introducing new curatorial approaches and exhibition designs (Phillips 2011).

The example of the Ethnological Museum's exhibition planning for the Humboldt Forum Berlin¹ shows this very clearly. In September 2022, the second part of the permanent exhibition was inaugurated, including an Amazonian section that fits in with the general plan of geographically structured presentations, highlighting special masterpieces. In the case of Amazonia, a mixed set of particularly beautiful or well-crafted items were selected with the idea of giving an overview of this region's cultural practices (see Scholz 2022). Although the Forum's planning process did not really allow for joint curating, some level of collaboration has been introduced in the Amazonian exhibition since 2014, when the Indigenous organisation Kuyujani of the Ye'kwana, and some individuals from this group² took part in the planning as partners of Andrea Scholz who has been responsible for the South American Ethnographic section since then.

The Ye'kwana were involved in the development of the exhibition at certain points, like the conception of video works, and the very shape of the exhibition space—which mimics a traditional Ye'kwana roundhouse. Nonetheless, only a small part of what took place in this collaboration was incorporated into texts and media stations—as has been the case with the outcomes of later collaborative projects with Amazonian partners implemented by Scholz on behalf of the Ethnological Museum Berlin (also referred to here as EM).

As a result, the Amazonian exhibition ended up consisting of selected artefacts from different societies placed inside vitrines which are arranged to create a dialogue with Indigenous architecture. Nonetheless, despite this attempt to incorporate Indigenous spatial concepts, classic museum logic comes across as more dominant. The pieces sit protected within heavy glass boxes, explained by simple texts aimed at a non-specialist audience, eventually with the help of predefined and standardised media applications. The characteristic complexity of these artefacts, which point to cosmological, cultural, and ecological contents, was reduced in order to keep the exhibition concise and easily digestible. In the end, an essential degree of density necessary to communicate Indigenous perspectives was lost, as pointed out by the Amazonian guests who visited the opening and criticised the lack of what they saw as crucial levels of detailed information.

This short account of the making of the Humboldt Forum's Amazonian exhibition is representative of what is currently happening in other ethnographic museums in Germany and many parts of the world. Ethnological museums are quite conventional when it comes to exhibiting Indigenous perspectives on so-called objects or presenting them in digital form, for example, in online catalogues or media stations. This is surprising, given the growing amount of information about Indigenous cultural belongings accumulated through anthropological studies over the last century, and the growing demand for dialogue, inclusion, and sometimes restitution from Indigenous communities (Peers and Brown 2003; Golding and Modest 2013; Schorch 2020). The explanation for this paradox may lie somewhere between the difficulty of leaving behind long-trained visual regimes, a lack of creativity, encrusted collection infrastructures, and institutional inertia.

In this text, we aim to take a deeper look at the possibilities of overcoming the still widespread incapacity of epistemic pluralisation in museum practices. We are not directly focusing on the colonial past of metropolitan museums and the violent circumstances through which many objects came into their collections. Although an inescapable topic, since it is connected to the way Western infrastructures of classification and exhibition were conceived and still operate (cf. Barringer and Flynn 1998), we want to shift the focus here from the past and the limits of museum practices to their still open possibilities. Our examples deal with collections from Amazonia which offer numerous points of departure for new curatorial approaches based on in-depth reflections and dialogues about the status of those things in their societies of origin. These examples raise two connected questions: First, how to define collaborative approaches in a context where actors conceive things differently? Secondly, how do we allow these actors' multiple and complex points of view to take the stage without losing sight of communication with the general public?

To frame our examples theoretically, we will first approach the problem of understanding *things* in non-Western societies through a brief overview of the anthropological discussion on material practices and exchanges, with

a special focus on the Amazonian contributions to this subject. Thereafter, we will present some general methodological aspects and specific outcomes of collaborative projects we have been conducting in dialogue with Baniwa, Kotiria, Tukano, Tuyuka, and Yebamasa Indigenous partners from the Upper Rio Negro region (Northwest of Amazonia, also referred here as URN). All projects took the collections as points of departure. These examples include individual projects as well as projects we have carried out together as a team. In all cases, we are interested in showing how complexity unfolds from engagements with certain items, and which unexpected results emerged from these engagements. This focus on methodology helps us clarify what we mean by *collaborative curation*.

Thinking Things Anthropologically

From the 18th century onwards, Western thinkers like Adam Smith, Anne Robert Jacques Turgot, and others developed a view of the nature of things in the non-Western world which was connected to a perspective on the so-called “primitive,” or “communitarian” exchanges (cf. Servet, 1981; Graeber, 2011). Anthropologists, sociologists, and economists contrasted the exchanges taking place in “modern” and “premodern” societies in such a way that the former would be “rational” and “impersonal”—constituting an autonomous domain of the social world (“the economic” one)—while the latter would articulate different social domains—the individual, the domestic, the public—being “contaminated” by ties that are not “strictly” economic.

Along these lines, Marcel Mauss’ famous *Essai sur le don* (1925) presented gift exchange in societies from the Pacific and the North American Northwest Coast as a “total social fact.” Gift exchanges in these societies were described as having an obligatory, mutual, and inalienable character that highlights an *enduring connection between the thing exchanged and the person who exchanges it*. Exchanges would be “the foundation of social ties” in contexts that did not (yet) observe the separation between things (*res*) and persons (*personae*) supposedly known in the Western world since Roman times.

It is beyond the scope of this text to propose a critique of the Maussian view of exchange and its deep roots in anthropological thinking. It is enough for us to point out that, since Mauss’ seminal piece, various approaches to the status of things in non-Western societies have dealt with the *Essay*’s fundamental proposals; these range from the structuralist emphasis on the concept of *exchange* and *reciprocity* (Lévi-Strauss 1949), the structural Marxism’s comprehensive *typology of modes of production* (Sahlins 1972), the culturalist critique of the latter by feminist anthropology (Strathern 1988), the contextual and transformational view of exchanges that emphasises its historicity and the change of the status of things (Appadurai 1986; Thomas 1991), and the very critique of the basal assumptions of Western economic thinking (Graeber 2001, 2011; Graeber and Wengrow 2021), including its characteristic supposed separation between economy and private life (Zelizer 2005).

What matters for the argument of this text is the *Essay's* enduring legacy in pointing to the perceived *agency of things* in non-Western cultures. Regarding our ethnographic region of choice, Amazonia, several publications have been emphasising the different ontological status of objects in the region since the end of the 2000s (Santos-Granero 2009; Chaumeil and Hill 2011). These texts highlight how object regimes vary enormously from society to society (Hugh-Jones 2009), and are influenced by specific concepts of kinship, nurture, and ownership (Carneiro da Cunha 2009; Brightman et al. 2016).

This renewed reflection on the status of things in Amazonia links to the so-called ontological turn, which was strongly fostered by ethnographic research in the region. In particular, it was connected to the demand to “take indigenous people’s knowledge systems seriously,” and extended this demand to the understanding of the material world. In spite of all the criticism addressed to the so-called “ontology fashion”—too theoretical, too out of touch with reality, too strongly influenced by French structuralism (Ramos 2012; Bessire and Bond 2014)—and the concerns and debates raised on the real benefits of ethnographically researching things (Holbraad, Wastell and Henare 2006), we believe that a focus on different living worlds is crucial to promote more awareness of the different ethics orienting the human-things relationships across distinct human experiences.

These reflections point to the critical relevance of understanding native conceptions of material culture in order to redirect museum practices. To mention just a few famous examples from different parts of Amazonia, how could one exhibit Mamaindê (Nambikwara) or Mebemgokrê-Kayapó body adornments without considering that they are understood as components of a person by both Indigenous groups to such an extent that the latter even bury personal belongings alongside their departed (Miller 2009; Turner 2009)? How could one, inside museum spaces, appropriately address practices such as food offerings for masks and flutes that are characteristics of object regimes such as that of the Waujá (Barcelos Neto 2009)?

In our collaborations, we have been dealing with similar questions raised by encounters with things produced in one specific Amazonian area, the URN, a region with a massive presence of artefacts in people’s social life. To introduce the human-thing-relations guiding our curatorial practices, we will further discuss the underlying object regime conceptions of URN in the next section.

Upper Rio Negro’s Object Regime

The URN’s ideas and practices concerning things can be summarised as follows: across this region, artefacts are engaged in networks of exchange and reciprocity, which are, on their part, embedded in a socio-ecology of humans and more-than-human beings. This network points to a biography of a given artefact that expresses itself in daily activities and in elaborated ritual complexes.

The first ethnographic reports about the URN show the overarching presence of things in this region (Coudreau 1887; Wallace 1889; Rodrigues Ferreira 1972); a presence that attracted interest from collectors and explorers worldwide (Koch-Grünberg 1909; Nimuendajú 1950³), and resulted in dozens of collections now present in the main ethnographic museums of the world—from Gothenburg, Paris, and Berlin, to Rio de Janeiro, Belém, Washington DC and New York.

From the mid-20th century on, modernist ethnographers working in the region emphasised how the trade of objects between the many ethnic groups' component units—sibs or clans—played a vital role in the social cohesion of the URN. That role comprises exclusive rights for the production of things such as ritual stools, basketry, pottery, canoes, and manioc graters (Galvão 1959, 1979; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1985; Ricardo and Cabalzar 2006) and rights to the distribution of the raw materials necessary to produce things (Ribeiro 1980, 1995). Moreover, the exchange of things was described as embedded in encompassing ritual complexes that mark this region, such as mourning rituals with their dancing masks (Goldman 2004); the Jurupari complex, with its sacred flutes and trumpets (Saake 1956; Hugh-Jones 1979); and the Dabucuri complex, with its musical instruments and playful exchange of food, beverage, basketry, and pottery (Hugh-Jones 1980; Hill 1993).

More recently, there has been an emphasis on the connection between the way URN people conceive the origin of humankind connected to powerful things with subject status (Hugh-Jones 2009). These subject-things include the so-called *Instruments of Creation and Transformation*, which, in their original form (made of white quartz), existed as body parts of the region's cultural ancestors. The power of these ancestors created the world, starting the process that brought human beings into existence. Moreover, throughout this process, body adornments were attributed to human beings; when worn by dancers in the longhouses during ritual occasions that last several days and nights, they transport the dancers back to the original time of the world's creation.

In this context, *knowing a given thing's biography* is critical for establishing ownership over it. To own something is to be able to tell its history from the time of the world's creation to its more recent history (Hugh-Jones 1995, 2009). That capacity is an attribution of specialists responsible for keeping relationships between people and things for their communities, in particular the *baya*, a Tukano designation for the URN “master of ceremonies.”

Curating and Creating Relations

The embeddedness of things in the network of life as presented above points to the fact that “ethnographic objects” are indeed *more than objects*.⁴ Usually, curators try to present such concepts to the public through short explanatory texts attached to artefacts in labels, or through actions connected to artefacts in videos aimed to “give to the public the cultural context” of a

decontextualised thing. This approach, however, does not let these concepts really impact curatorial practices. Thus, instead of dealing with them as *relational guides*, they are usually represented as *objects of knowledge*.

In our collaborative projects with Indigenous partners, we tried to develop a different approach. Instead of representing Indigenous ideas of objects, we came more and more to engage with the network of life in which Amazonian things are inserted into. That meant incorporating practices such as *mutuality* and *reciprocity* as guides for developing curatorial methodological approaches. In this line, *curating became the act of creating and caring for relations between people and things, inside and outside museum settings*.

We developed this approach by recognising a significant distance from some cases that populate the literature about Indigenous engagements with museum collections. In our experience, the fact that the *things held in museums exist in a continuation of the relational field in which they were created* was a more dominant topic for our partners than the fact that those *things were collected in unequal historical settings*. We have reasons to believe that this did not happen by chance, since museum records are frequently superficial in registering details about the acquisition of collections—a fact that challenges the URN sense of ownership, and consequently questions a museum's control of collections acquired over a long time, as we will discuss below.

Given this context, in our collaborations, we have *chosen to promote a careful reconnection between our partners and their ancestors' cultural belongings as a starting point for re-engaging museums with communities*.⁵ Thus, we could find time and space to care about the future of these shared heritages. The first two contexts in which this reconnection happened were workshops pursuing the main idea of engaging people and collections, and field workshops directed towards producing new things after the experience with “confined” museological artefacts (Figure 2.1).

Engaging with Collections

The first step for the reconnection between ethnological museum collections and URN communities consisted of workshops intended to promote a complete overview of a given collection and to find areas of common interest between museums and communities. These workshops took place in museum storage facilities, as in the case of the project *Sharing Knowledge* coordinated by Scholz, when representatives from the Colombian, Venezuelan, and Brazilian Amazonia travelled to Germany to get in touch with the EM collections.⁶ The workshops could also take place in Indigenous communities, with the support of photographs and other collection records, as it happened in the Prodocult Baniwa project, carried out by Thiago da Costa Oliveira at the Museu do Índio/FUNAI, in Brazil (Figure 2.2).⁷

After finding an area of common interest, the second stage of these encounters followed a model of open and lengthy conversations and other



Figure 2.1 Guilherme (Guiré) Tenório showing the use of the rattle lance to the Brazilian and Colombian guests of the Sharing Knowledge workshop—2018. © Photo by Natalia Pavia.



Figure 2.2 Maria Fontes and other two women looking at pictures of pottery from multiple Brazilian ethnographic museum collections during the first workshop of the Prodocult Baniwa project at the Baniwa village of Ucuquicachoeira—2012. © Photo by Thiago da Costa Oliveira.

exchanges about the chosen artefacts. In these situations, the Indigenous partners of the respective projects could freely examine the belongings of their ancestors (an encounter that sometimes happened for the first time), share stories transmitted to them by their ancestors, make photographs or drawings, and comment on the techniques and materials employed to produce the artefacts. Collections were thus studied in processes of auto-ethnography that turned fieldwork “on its head” (Fienup-Riordan 1998). It was not uncommon that these encounters also led to performances (see Fienup-Riordan (1998) and Bell (2017) for other, similar examples), like dancing with collection items—a point of extreme relevance from the Indigenous point of view, since the objects in storage facilities were seen as “lonely,” as many of our partners have pointed out to us, and disconnected from the social life they used to be engaged with. Touching, dancing, recollecting stories thus created a *new relational vocabulary and pragmatics* for artefacts once understood exclusively in the secluded-sacralised Western notion of museum/representation.

Another critical aspect of these first (re-)encounters were exchanges about caring practices that helped museum conservators and curators to understand the Indigenous conceptions of care and conservation (see Gabler and Tello 2019). Conversely, from an Indigenous perspective, direct contact with the conservators had an affective dimension, as they are considered the persons directly responsible for the welfare of Indigenous cultural belongings in their museum lives. As a museum is a genuine Western institution, people who did not grow up in this part of the world may have very little idea of what this institution is meant for. The engagement with the museum staff and space—with its laboratories, drawers, cabinets, dividers, displays, computers and its professionals with masks, gloves, and aprons—conveys much better the spirit of these institutions than long explanations about this subject. This helped to foster mutual understanding and familiarity, both essential prerequisites for collaborative museum work.

Producing Things

After the first engagements with collections, our projects evolved into field workshops where new artefacts were produced. Actually, the production of artefacts has been a central area of concern of our partners, and an integral part of our projects since the beginning of our collaborations. The desire to regain contact with things at the museum has always been connected to the desire to be able to (re-)make these things. Moreover, as things are seen as inserted in a network of life, the know-how to make them means the ability to master the relational networks the things are embedded in. As we will see in this section, this *mastering* is even more important than the simple *possession* of a given thing.

Production workshops normally lasted from 1 to 3 weeks and, in some cases, were also carried out without non-Indigenous researchers. Even when

participating, we tended to stay in the background and focused on the documentation or tried our hand at making artefacts ourselves. These workshops were usually led by elders of the communities, or masters in a given production, who passed on their practical knowledge of materials and techniques to younger generations. For us, as external observers, to follow the operational chains of production meant entering an entire world of relations hardly noticed in the final object form.

Usually, the production started with the collection of raw materials in different parts of the territory. This step could happen all at once or repeatedly during the workshop—depending on the amount of material required and the objects’ complexity. On these occasions, we learnt that supposedly “simple objects” made out of clay or vegetal fibre are much more complex when observed from close up. Basketry, for instance, was also made of pigments and dyes to colour plant fibres and different plants transformed into cords and finishing rims. Pottery needed clay, but also the ashes of tree bark to transform the clay into a mouldable mixture. The ceramists also needed mineral pigments to create graphic designs on the pots, polishing stones, or seeds to refine the pot’s surface and many other tools and ingredients.

Many of the materials are only found far away from a given community, and the travels to reach them put the collectors into contact with a lived environment marked by the presence of humans and “more than human beings,” ranging from stinging insects, biting snakes, dangerous waterfalls, and swampy terrains, to surrounding villages and places that belonged to beings considered owners of animals or fishes (Figure 2.3). Thus, apart from the challenge of moving and reading the environment while searching for material resources, it was also necessary to observe the property rights over materials located in the vicinity of nearby villages or areas of activity of those spiritual owners. This meant getting permission from these neighbours either by directly asking them, in the case of the human ones, or by resorting to shamanic knowledge, in the case of the more than human neighbours (Costa Oliveira 2015, 2017). These production acts—the travelling and gathering of materials—are accompanied by a *relational ethic* that is not documented in the museum historical records about the same artefacts. Moreover, anthropological studies on “material culture” tend to neglect this broader range of relationships by taking “raw materials” as mere *resources* available for human projects (see Ingold (2007) for a similar critique).

After collecting materials, the next step of production is the processing of the things collected. This step could start in the forest, depending on the size of the material collected—like wood logs—or at the Indigenous villages. During the gathering of materials, we observed multiple exchanges of techniques and other knowledge practices between the Indigenous participants. Making pottery, for instance, involved removing stones from the clay, mixing it with bark ashes, and kneading this mixture for a long time until it was homogeneous and pliable enough to begin modelling (Figure 2.4). Making a



Figure 2.3 Adalberto Nilson Pedrosa collecting tree bark for finishing a tukano bench he was making in the context of an EM workshop coordinated by the authors in a partnership with the NGO Instituto Socioambiental at the URN village of Duraka. © Photo by Thiago da Costa Oliveira, 2019.



Figure 2.4 Nazaria Montenegro, co-coordinator of field research of the Prodocult Baniwa, modelling a pot during the production workshop of the Prodocut Baniwa Museu do Índio. © Photo by Thiago da Costa Oliveira, 2014.

ceremonial stool meant learning to carve a log with multiple tools. Actually, many body-learned techniques are inscribed in a given artefact, and these sections of the workshops highlighted these connections between bodies and things.

Apart from the focus on sharing techniques, the making of artefacts also highlighted the relevance of the narratives connected to these things. The time necessary to make something provided the right atmosphere to share stories about the thing made. On these occasions, the elders, in particular, refer to past context of use of a given artefact, or to songs and movements of a given dance related to them and a past ritual occasion in which a given thing was exchanged. In these contexts, the makers learned and shared another component of the things' biographies, highlighting the relevance of clan-specific knowledge to talk about things appropriately (Stephen Hugh-Jones 2009, 2014).

From these experiences, we learned that the combination of one workshop about collections and another to produce artefacts is a useful method for defining shared goals and interests, both for the museum and the communities. Ideally, this leads to a win-win situation. In the case of the Baniwa women, for instance, they helped the Museu do Índio to create better documentation for its historical collections when they reengaged with their pottery. On the other hand, the museum helped the Baniwa women's association to organise a workshop that activated a network of partners for trading pottery in local and national markets. Actually, the Baniwa women had been planning the creation of such a network for many years, and the fact that the museum, after the production workshop, was the first buyer of their pieces gave them the confidence to launch into larger ventures (Figure 2.5).

Thus, the shared activities help to find areas of relevance beyond the world of collection and representation of culture which is characteristic of museums. Consequently, while better-documented collections potentially translate into better museum publications and exhibitions; for communities, the main outcome of this kind of engagement is usually support for the maintenance of traditions and knowledge practices through intergenerational exchanges, as well as the creation of alternatives to make a living. This achievement is perhaps less scientifically than socio-politically relevant. Nonetheless, this impact is highly desired by our Indigenous partners, especially the ones who are frequently submitted to economic and cultural pressures to engage in predatory activities such as illegal mining and logging.

Remaking Powerful Relations

This idea of benefits that go beyond the collection/representational world of the museums has become an important landmark in our efforts in this field. A similar dynamic, albeit with different results, could be observed in the cooperation with the Indigenous school ENOSIMAR (Escuela Normal Superior Indígena Maria Reina) in Colombia, Mitú, that took part in the



Figure 2.5 Orlando Fontes recording his mother, Nazaria Montenegro, talking about the outcome of the production workshop promoted by the Prodocult Museu do Índio in the Baniwa village of São Joaquim. © Photo by Thiago da Costa Oliveira, 2014.

Sharing Knowledge project. Here, instead of making new collections or artefacts for selling, the Indigenous partners were seeking to promote other changes in their community life: They wanted to reinstate the social conditions in which community and intercommunity rituals could be performed—a condition that has been lost because of the effects of colonisation. As partner of the ENOSIMAR, the EM was required to support the building of a traditional longhouse in the Indigenous territory. That choice was connected to the specific biography of the body adornments they were focusing on during their collaborations with the museum.

The EM-ENOSIMAR collaboration started in 2014, when Kotiria and Desana representatives from Colombia went to a workshop organised by colleagues from the Universities in Berlin, Bonn, and Marburg (see Kraus, Kummels and Halbmayer 2018) and had the opportunity to see some of their region's traditional adornments for the first time.

This encounter was somehow traumatic for the Indigenous guests for many reasons. Firstly, these things are not simply body *adornments*, as the English word used to describe them might suggest. In the URN, feather ornaments are more than material possessions used to “adorn” or “decorate” the body. Because of the biography of these things⁷, they *are* considered ancestral clan members. Thus, the encounter with these things comprised the expectation to meet more than objects, in the sense that this museum visit could be better described as a meeting with long lost ancestors.

In the second place, one must consider that these artefacts are rarely found in the URN region today as a result of a violent colonial history which included a radical conversion project implemented by Salesian and Montfortian missionaries between the 1910s and the 1980s. During the times of the Christian missionaries, whole feather boxes including their contents were looted by the priests, who were aware of their central role in the ceremonial life of the region.⁸ Moreover, the transfer of Indigenous children to boarding schools, and the prohibition of “evil” rituals and the living in “evil” houses, i.e., the URN longhouses, lead to irreparable losses of ritual practices. Thus, the encounter with these collections activated these memories.

The third source of malaise during these initial contact with adornments relates to the fact that our Indigenous partners usually engage with museum collections with expectations anchored in their caring traditions. Thus, the Colombian guests expected to find their adornments stored in a palm leaf woven box, following the usual practice of safekeeping of powerful instruments in their longhouses. Contrary to these expectations, the adornments were stored in different closets, following the museum’s inner logic of separating objects by kind, material, and size. Additionally, the research in the museum records frustrated their expectation to meet specific Desana or Kotiria feather boxes, since most of these artefacts had insufficient descriptions from the time they were collected. So, the museum looked like a strange place where, at once, objects are rendered important, but at the same time powerless.

Here, it is appropriate to note that, in ethnographic museums, artefacts are normally identified by three sets of categories: the first highlights *Indigenous “uses”* (ritual objects, cooking implements, etc.) and *“materials”* (pottery, basketry); the second category points to the *collection history* (a collector, and a year of collection), and the third highlights *ethnic attributions* (such as the name of a given ethnic group, region, or linguist family). In the URN case, the simple mention of ethnic groups like “Tukano” and “Baniwa” found in the museum records fails to point to the relevant social units that, from an Indigenous perspective, connect an artefact with its owner, the clan. In the absence of this information, it is impossible to precisely identify who owned the things collected in the past, and whose creative power *is* or *was* embedded in these things. As a result, the restitution of artefacts has been frequently connected by our partners to the danger of bringing home something that pertains to other people; an act that could be a source of death and diseases (see Costa Oliveira and Scholz forthcoming; see also Martini 2012). In the context of the visit we have been describing, the research showed that the artefacts housed in Berlin belonged to multiple URN groups—instead of coming from only one.⁹ It would not make sense to return them to one community, because they belonged to several communities—including ones that, in the meantime, have ceased to exist.

In summary: the Colombian guests perceived the ornaments as body parts of clan members lost and lonely in the museum depot. Given this situation, the

Kotiria and Desana partners proposed two actions. The first one intended to guarantee that the displaced adornments would live together in the depot. In 2018, in order to accomplish this goal during another visit of the Colombian delegation together with representatives from the Brazilian part of the URN, an “exercise” took place in the depot. It consisted in using one of the palm leaf woven boxes from Koch-Grünberg’s collection to house a complete set of adornments. Thus, at least ideally, they would become one allegoric body (Figure 2.6).

The second set of actions took place outside the museum. After the referred visit to Berlin, the Kotiria decided to build a longhouse in Macucu, at the Colombian URN. That is the community of Orlando Villegas, a key project partner who belongs to the high-ranked *Ñahori* clan of the Kotiria people. Nowadays, because of the colonial history referred above, this clan counts only a few members. Macucu, their village, has been exposed to violent contact with white military, rubber bosses, missionaries, and members of guerrilla forces. Thus, the choice of building a longhouse there in 2019 was a significant one, even though building was not enough. A longhouse is a place of rituals. Thus, to complete and inaugurate the Macucu House of Knowledge, singers and dancers from other communities were invited to recreate a ritual atmosphere lost a long time ago. Subsequently, a process began in which rituals called *dabucuri* were held to exchange dance ornaments



Figure 2.6 Sharing Knowledge workshop to discuss the EM URN collections with Brazilian and Colombian partners. The table shows how dancers used to use the adornments in their bodies—from head (top) to feet (bottom). © Photo by Natalia Pavia, 2018.



Figure 2.7 Celebration of the building the Macucu Maloca during an onsite Sharing Knowledge project workshop and film documentation. © Photo by Mikko Gaestel, 2019.

from neighbouring communities, and Macucu started to regain its former power—and adornments (Figure 2.7).¹⁰

In this experience, the ornaments found in the EM depot acted as catalysts and mediators for the building of the longhouse in the Kotiria territory, which led us to state that they are unfolding their original power even without being moved. Instead of a restitution of dance ornaments, which would not have made sense in the Macucu case for the reasons already mentioned, what happened in this museum project was the empowerment of a fragmented and weakened community by the reinstatement of a situation in which they are able to celebrate rituals and festivals in their new longhouse (see Costa Oliveira and Scholz forthcoming).

Co-Creating Collaborative Works

During the same 2018 Sharing Knowledge workshop, in which a new storage option was designed for the URN ornaments in the EM, another artefact caught the attention of the project's guests. Damião Amaral Barbosa, Yebamasa, and Indigenous environmental researcher (AIMA, in the Portuguese acronym) for the non-governmental organisation ISA (Instituto Socioambiental), explained that the adze VB 5445, a mixture of hoe and axe and a popular carving tool in the region, was known as a powerful protective instrument in the URN tradition.¹¹ As an instrument, *Sio Yahpu* represents the cosmic power of the *Ayawa*, and is carried by the lead dancer in one ritual. The circle on which the

dancers perform also represents the annual cycle and the constellations, or the circling of the constellations around the earth. The meanings of *Sio Yahpu* do not end here. As a constellation that partially coincides with the Greek constellation of Orion, it is among the many stars that helps the people in the region to identify the change of seasons in this equatorial part of the world. The Tukano and Arawak groups in the region are river dwellers, fishing is immensely important and elaborate. In the dry season, various traps are used to fish in the rapids. Complementary to fishing, cassava is cultivated on slash-and-burn fields; the women are the custodians of the cassava plants. Rituals in which members of different communities invite each other for different occasions (e.g., the Jurupari and Dabucuri mentioned above, but also political gatherings) also play an important role in the annual cycle. The work of researchers like Barbosa is to document the complexities of the URN's calendar and its seasons, noting in diaries and representing in cyclic calendar phenomena such as river floods (*poero*), rainy and dry periods, times of fish reproduction, ripening, harvesting, and the rituals connected to each moment of the year (see Calbazar 2016).

Inspired by the meeting with *Sio Yahpu* at the depot, Barbosa presented to the other participants of the workshop the work of the AIMAS on the ecological annual cycle and its connection to the constellations (Figure 2.8). Through this presentation and the following discussions, the guests from the Brazilian part of the URN felt encouraged to formulate their wish for a larger



Figure 2.8 The Yebamasa researcher Damião Amaral Barbosa exploring the multiple meanings of the VB 5445 artefact from the EM collection in an interview at the museum's depot. © Photo by Thiago da Costa Oliveira, 2019.

presentation of the topic in the form of an exhibition at the Humboldt Forum. The idea was to present the calendar and the environmental researchers' focus on documenting it and connecting both the registering of their traditions to a more accurate picture of the effects of climate change in their region. Drawings play an important role in the documentation and it was precisely this well-established practice of intercultural communication that provided the idea for a video projection on the façade of the Humboldt Forum in September 2019, during the celebrations of the 250th birthday of Alexander von Humboldt.

The making of "The Annual Cycle at the Upper Tiquié" presentation included a workshop on site, in São Gabriel da Cachoeira. Damião Amaral Barbosa, some other AIMAs and Andrea Scholz were guided by the elder Tarcisio Barreto in the process of creating a script that linked the myths about the origin of the constellations to the phenomena and activities in the annual cycle. Drawing was done on a plexiglass sheet by the AIMAs skilled in this art, such as Cesar Meira, Felix Rezende, Amarildo Lima, Edilson Ramos, Ismael dos Santos, and Antonio Tenorio, with the support of the graphic artist Raiz Campos. The drawing process was filmed from the other side of the transparency by Costa Oliveira. Later, the footage was assembled by Mikko Gaestel and Costa Oliveira in Berlin to be projected onto the façade.

As a finished film, the drawings and the people drawing them presented the main features of the URN calendar on the façade of the Humboldt Forum.¹² It was only with the projection that we, as part of the team of realisers, became aware that we had altogether created a collective, transcultural work of art that united completely different "genres": narrative art, acting with simultaneous drawing, the composition of light and movement in film, and the montage of the footage as a gigantic site-specific video projection with mapping on the façade with its windows. The ephemeral nature of this artwork in some ways matched the ephemeral nature of the ritual occasions of which *Sio Yahpu* may once have been a part.

Conclusion

We selected these projects from a broader set of collaborative projects we have been promoting over the last years because they were a key factor in advancing a series of learnings and challenges we have been addressing in our collaborations.¹³

All projects taught us key features of collection entities, which we had first learned theoretically through the analysis of the URN's artefacts. Collection entities, such as ethnographic artefacts, pictures, and audio-visual records, are made from connections in the sense that these items have an indexical nature that makes them a condensation of multiple referents. Artefacts point to plants and animals, which point to places, which point to more than human beings (for example, the *wai mahsa*, fish people, or the *Ayawa*, star

people and creators of the world), which point to histories of techniques and to the mythic dimension of life. These connections are linked to the Western history of the acquisition of things, which points to collectors, expeditions, museums, repository numbers, etc. When a documentary picture depicts one of these artefacts in context, it contains all these connections, and others—to the person who took the picture, the equipment, and medium used, the picture's number in the archive, and so on. The same, of course, could be written about sound recordings and other documentary materials. Our experiences have taught us that an integrated approach to these connections implies interdisciplinarity—from biology to anthropology, archival sciences, and digital humanities—and multiperspectivity—from scientific to so-called non-scientific approaches.

The second lesson learned regards a persistent feature of the museological endeavour. While working in and for museum institutions, projects tend to collect a surplus of materials that exceeds the “digestive” capacity of such institutions. That is a constitutive feature of ethnographic museums, since its formative times, when museums collected many more items than they could ever study or absorb. Today, in the current digital age, the challenge of digitising all these materials comes with the challenge of digesting the accumulated digital surrogates and new records produced after the popularisation of photographic cameras, camcorders, audio recorders, lenses, microphones, hard drives, etc. This massive number of materials needs to be integrated according to the different points of view expressed in the entities via the connection perspective presented above.

That surplus of materials is also connected with a communication problem. Only a small selection of what is collected and documented can be shown to the public. This is because preconceived exhibition formats proceed from certain ideas of what the public wants, for example, “masterpieces” or “shorter” exhibition films. Another reason is technological and infrastructural constraints that make the connection between, for instance, archival footage and objects in the exhibition, difficult. There is also a lack of formats that allow the navigation of the objects' proposed connections. Media stations are typically formatted to contain a video or audio that points to an object in context. But the connectivity we saw in the museum entities appropriate more than one context to one piece. For instance, the building process and the inauguration of the new longhouse built in Colombia by the Kotiria and Desana partners of the Sharing Knowledge project was documented on video and assembled in a 25-min film. However, the film was shown in the Humboldt Forum only once because it was “too long for exhibition rooms.” This project's raw footage shows how the building process and the techniques and construction materials are connected to a complexity of other subjects such as the local clan history and history of contact, the myths of origin, personal biographies, and so on. To access this material, which is now stored in offline hard drives, we need presentation and research formats that navigate the complex interrelationships between

these contexts while retaining an appealing and informative look.¹⁴ In order to implement this kind of solution, museums need to organise themselves to identify and publish their sources of information, thus making them accessible to researchers, museum visitors and, especially, to the communities of origin, helping them to use them beyond the collection world and the museum environment.

The third set of lessons learned refers to a more political dimension. On the one hand, our collaborative projects teach us that we need to be attentive to what precisely happens *beyond the museum world*. Collections are good starting points for collaborative projects. Nonetheless, they do not need to be the ending project of these ventures. Museum projects can be good opportunities for the museums not only to update their knowledge about their collections but also to reinsert themselves into their community of origin's life—that was the main lesson of initiatives such as the Baniwa Pottery, and the Macucu House of Knowledge. This assumes that a new position regarding these communities is affirmed and a reciprocity role that implies returning more than taking is accepted.

In accordance with this logic, museums also need to let the communities use their representational space for a representation of themselves and their fundamental questions and dilemmas. That is a possible way out of the objectifying nature of the so-called exhibition complex. Projects like the Tiquié Calendar projection invite us to reflect on contemporary Indigenous lives in ways that go beyond our ideas of traditional Indigenous cultures. By showing how our Indigenous partners interpreted the museum as a “machine of representation” and emphasising contemporary Indigenous activities, such as environmental research and artwork, this project made clear that Indigenous people live in the present and have a future in which they themselves are the protagonists (Figure 2.9).

In the many situations of cooperation with our Indigenous partners, we were repeatedly taught that the things in the museum are not mere objects but instruments, agents, representatives of a specific territory, and mediators of reciprocal relationships. We consider that these concepts should not be treated simply as information about the ontological status of objects in the societies of origin, passed on by Indigenous “informants” to academic experts, but taken seriously as paradigms for creating new and sustainable relationships between museums and communities. Creativity and openness are two essential prerequisites for collaborative curating, as becomes particularly evident here. To close this text, it is critical to again say that the creation of these collaborative methods reflect a change intended by our curatorial interventions from the objectification of Indigenous knowledge through representation to an engagement with Indigenous relational ethics in creative ways. Concisely, this is what we mean by collaborative curation.



Figure 2.9 Rosivaldo Pereira, Damião Amaral Barbosa, Andrea Scholz presenting the Tukano bench to the State Minister of Culture Claudia Roth (with Hermann Parzinger, Lars-Christian Koch, and Hartmut Dorgerloh in the background) during the inauguration of the Eastern Wing of the Humboldt Forum, in September 2022. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum/Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss/ Photo by Stefanie Loos.

Notes

- 1 The Humboldt Forum is a cultural centre in Berlin that houses exhibitions by the Ethnological Museum and the Museum of Asian Art (both belong to the State Museums of Berlin) as well as exhibitions by other actors and provides space for events and an extensive cultural program (cf. www.humboldtforum.org/de/). The building is a reconstruction of the former Berlin City Palace; this fact caused a lot of critical debates in Berlin and beyond (cf. von Bose 2016).
- 2 See footnote 6 for a detailed description of the underlying project timeline, funding, and partners.
- 3 Curt Nimuendaju travelled to the URN in 1927 but his report remained unpublished until 1950.
- 4 See Costa Oliveira (2019) to watch Damião Barbosa talking about the notion of “more than objects.”
- 5 For some similar approaches, see Silverman (2015) and Anderson and Christen (2019).

- 6 The Sharing Knowledge project was initially funded by the Kulturstiftung des Bundes as part of the Humboldt Lab Dahlem (2014/2015). From 2016 to 2021, it was mainly financed by the Volkswagen Stiftung with additional support by the Kulturstiftung des Bundes. Some activities that are mentioned in this text were co-funded by the Stiftung Humboldt Forum im Berliner Schloss. Active project partners were the Organización Indígena de la Cuenca del Caura Kuyujani (Venezuela), the Conselho Indígena de Roraima (Brazil), the Associação Wanasseduume Ye'kwana (Brazil)—all from the Guayana region/the Northeastern part of Amazonia—and the Escuela Normal Superior Indígena María Reina (Colombia), the Federação das Organizações Indígenas do Rio Negro/Instituto Socioambiental (Brazil)—all from the URN region. Contacts with partners gradually emerged through personal networks and through proactive contacting, implied by the focuses of the Ethnological Museum's South American collection. See Scholz 2017, 2018, Scholz and Guzman 2021.
- 7 The Prodocult Baniwa Project was part of a broader initiative called Documentation Project of Indigenous Cultures and Languages in Brazil—PROGDOC in its Portuguese acronym. The PROGDOC was conceptualized and directed by the Museu do Índio/FUNAI, funded by the Brazilian State, and administered with the support of UNESCO (cf. Levinho, Costa Oliveira and Couto 2021). The Prodocult Baniwa Project lasted between 2012 and 2014 and financed many activities about the Baniwa Pottery, in a special partnership with the Women's Association from the Ayari River (AMIRA, in its Portuguese acronym). The contact with the specific Baniwa community originally came about through the field research that Thiago da Costa Oliveira was conducting for his dissertation (See Costa Oliveira 2021).
- 8 Later, the Indigenous people came to know that the priests had sold them out to museums or kept them in their museological institutions (Nimuendajú 1950; Martini 2012).
- 9 Theodor Koch-Grünberg assembled the Berlin collection under different circumstances but not in the absence of substantial Indigenous resistance. In his published travelogue (Koch-Grünberg, 1909), the collector mentions how he overcame this resistance by appealing for ever more valuable gifts to be exchanged with the longhouse chiefs. From the documents left, it is impossible to know to what extent his offers were understood regarding the possibilities of moving these inalienable things between communities. Traditionally, that could happen on special ritual occasions or during intertribal raids (Hugh-Jones, 2014: 158). In one opportunity, at least, Koch-Grünberg reports that his travel companion, O. Schmidt, succeeded in obtaining a complete set of adornments from an Indigenous chief who had lost his people to a rubber boss. The mention of this acquisition needs to be taken into consideration with the fact that part of the Koch-Grünberg collection was disassembled at least on two occasions: in Belém do Pará, where part of his acquisitions was exchanged with the Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi as a counterpart for his collection activities; and during World War II.
- 10 As may have already become clear, each element in the mythology and cosmology of the URN has a counterpart on different levels. The feather box with its elements is a representation of the mythical anaconda with its occupants and is embodied on a higher level by the longhouse, where the ritual (and in the past, or in a few

- cases to this day, family) reproduction of the community takes place (Hugh Jones 2014, 2019).
- 11 This artefact was collected by Theodor Koch-Grünberg who travelled through the Tiquié River during the years 1903–1905. The Tiquié River is a tributary of the Vaupés, which in turn flows into the Rio Negro.
 - 12 See Costa Oliveira, Thiago and Gaestel, Mikko (2021).
 - 13 These learnings and challenges have also been addressed in our current collaborative project “Connect – Comprehend – Communicate: Amazonia as a Laboratory for the Future” (2021–2024, financed by the German Federal Cultural Foundation) addresses the challenge of communicating collection complexity cross-culturally through digital tools that highlight the Indigenous perspective on artefacts and other collection items, and offer new venues to connect entities from different sources of information. Since we learned that, from indigenous perspectives, artefacts are integrated into much larger networks in which plants, animals, ancestors, spirits, and territories are represented, the digital sources include diverse digitised collections, from artefacts to botanical herb-arium, audiovisual materials, books, travelogues, archival records, and other entities (cf. Scholz, Costa Oliveira and Dörk 2021). For the same reason, a group of different collection institutions entered the project, from museums to a botanical garden and a library. The partners of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz are the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut, and the Institut für Museumsforschung. The project also includes the Botanischer Garten/Botanisches Museum Berlin as a source of botanical information and experience in digital resources and biodiversity informatics, the Museu Nacional (UFRJ – Brazil), as a strategic partner for reaching communities from the Upper Xingu and URN and the FH Potsdam, as the digital partner, responsible for developing the digital tools.
 - 14 The same thing happened with the Calendar projection, which was screened only one weekend. Its mountains of film material, drawings, contextual information lie in personal and institutional archives far away from the public.

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3 Making Kin, Reanimating Relations in the Museum Collection

Magdalena Buchczyk

Introduction

The question of relationality has been the subject of extensive debates in art, archaeology, and anthropology (Miller 1987; Latour 1994; Strathern 1996; Gell 1998; Bourriaud 2002; Hodder 2012; Ingold 2002; Sansi 2020). Scholars highlight that collections constitute bundles of relations, connecting particular ways of knowing, curatorial desires, and decisions, as well as relations between places, histories, mobilities, and social life-worlds (O’Hanlon and Welsch 2001; Bell 2017). Museum collections are entwined with patterns of past curatorial activity but also the broader epistemologies and moral economies of collecting (Thomas 1991; Macdonald 2006). They carry the traces of past acquisition processes from selection, documentation, and classification to valuation (Harrison 2015; Bennett et al. 2017). Moreover, they materialise the implicit and explicit orders of things and legacies of knowledge production, many of which are colonial, sexist, or ableist (Lynch and Aberti 2010; Kros 2014; Rieger and Strickfaden 2018). They are often shaped by asymmetrical encounters, acts of violence and dispossession, dramatic social changes, and practices of boundary-making (Coombes 1994; Barringer and Flynn 2012; Colwell 2015).

Working with collections generates knowledge, social relationships, and social practice, reflecting approaches to the social and material world (Macdonald 2006, 83). In this context, curatorial work is often framed as relational practice par excellence involving connections between knowledges, infrastructures, affects, and actions that bring things out into the world (Rogoff 2013; Bell 2017). It manifests relations between people and things and mobilises the commitment to relational ethics (Sarr and Savoy 2018; Marstine and Kay 2021). This chapter seeks to contribute to the discussion on how museum and exhibition practices manifest relations by considering how knowledge production intersects with practices of relatedness. By focusing on exhibition practices made with and around an object from the collection of Museum Europäischer Kulturen—Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

(Museum of European Cultures, hereafter the MEK), it explores the potential of animating relatedness rather than just relationality.

The chapter is based on a broader historical and ethnographic study of the MEK collections between March 2019 and February 2021. During this project, I spent 13 months in the museum's archive and library, participated in the Collection Concept workshop, and attended the anniversary conference and the regular curatorial meetings (Wissenschaftliches Kolloquium, hereafter WiKo). The WiKos focused on current activities, exhibitions, and event programme plans, and discussions about collection development. Rather than mapping relations of museum objects, this chapter asks about the role of exhibition-making in manifesting a collection's relationality. The first part explores how relationality is framed in the MEK collection through the changing collection strategy and its shift from the generic "cultural contacts" framework to more specific relationality, such as the theme of "glocal Europe." The second part takes the example of a textile object from the MEK collection to investigate how the relations of "glocal Europe" are manifested in the exhibition context. Moreover, I show how display practices materialise the global connections of the object and the related sartorial practices in different ways. In the third section, I reflect on the ambiguities and blind spots emergent in the exhibition context as well as the ways in which performance of relatedness might address some of the limitations. Finally, I argue for considering kinship a productive and politically expedient mode of animating relationality in the collection and exhibition practice (Bell 2022).

Glocal Europe: Reframing Collection Relations at the MEK

The relationality of material culture has been a critical consideration in the creation of the MEK. Since the museum was established in its current form in 1999 (Karasek and Tietmeyer 1999), it has strived to tell a relational rather than geographical or chronological story of European cultures. For example, the latest collection presentation, developed in 2011, aims to present relations between the idiosyncratic historical collections (Früh 2014) through the framework of "cultural contacts." The vast gallery, covering 700 square metres, is arranged into rooms with thematic displays of artefacts from various predecessor institutions, placed into interrelated thematic islands. A diverse array of objects, ranging from a Venetian gondola to pieces of traditional dress, Cold War diplomatic gifts, football shirts, and coffee sets, aim to highlight three related topics of "Borders," "Encounters," and "Religiosity." The gallery seeks to represent a vision of a relational museum and a forum for cultural contacts stimulating participation and exchange and representing the pressing issues in European societies and politics (Tietmeyer 2013).

At the same time, implicit in this perspective on relations in the 2011 gallery is a perceived boundary between European and “non-European cultures” (Karasek and Tietmeyer 1999, 13). According to Elisabeth Tietmeyer, the director of the MEK:

The exhibition reveals that Europe, despite the diversity of its cultures and their “manifestations”, is vested with a cultural concord that distinguishes it from other continents, but also from individual national perspectives
(Tietmeyer 2013, 64)

While the interrelated presentation of the permanent gallery sheds light on the complex connectivity of material culture, as Chiara de Cesari (2017) has aptly observed, the cultural-contacts framework emphasises the distinctiveness of Europe as a socio-cultural formation.

Scholars like Stuart Hall have long explored the implicit consequences of imagining Europe as a bounded place with clear margins between what is seen as “European” and “non-European.”

Europe’s external relations with its Others has been central to the European story since its inception, and remains so. The story of European identity is often told as if it had no exterior. But this tells us more about how cultural identities are constructed—as ‘imagined communities’, through the marking of difference with others—than it does about the actual relations of unequal exchange and uneven development through which a common European identity was forged

(Hall 1991, 18)

While the permanent gallery seeks to problematise identities as relational processes, De Cesari echoes Hall’s point on the idea of bounded Europe in relation to MEK’s Cultural Contacts gallery. As Cris Shore (2000, 64) observed, projects defining Europe “from a cultural perspective” paradoxically risk perpetuating elitist or ethnocentric ideas of Europe’s heritage. Embedded in the framework of defining Europe as unity in diversity (Tietmeyer 2013, 65), the display might represent unexpected relations between disparate objects like diplomatic gifts and traditional dress while at the same time risking perpetuating ethnocentric and identitarian ideas of Europeaness.

Recently, the MEK’s curatorial team has engaged in institutional reflection, seeking to critically address the limitations of the cultural contact frame of relationality and the implicit bounded imaginary of European material culture (Edenheiser 2020; Tietmeyer 2020). For this reason, the global relationality of material culture was placed at the fore of the current MEK’s collection development strategy (Buchczyk 2022). The 2020 collection strategy document (hereafter *Collection Concept*) states that one of the key areas of collection development at the MEK is linked to the topic of “Europe within a global context,” often referred to as “glocal Europe”:

Europe is not a never-changing, culturally homogeneous continent that is separated from other cultures. Interconnectedness and globalisation processes have always played a prominent role in people's daily lives. The MEK explores the question of which elements of Europe's tangible and intangible cultural heritage are viewed as "European culture" in other parts of the world. This can include objects, stylistic features, rituals, techniques, materials, etc. It emphasises multiperspectival research on the objects as well as the question of the means by which they reached other countries and how they changed in the process

(Collection Concept 2020, 18)

The Collection Concept emphasises a different scale of the collection's relationality. Here, Europe is no longer seen as a neutral backdrop for cultural contacts but as a dynamic and interconnected social formation entangled with globalisation. The aim is to collect the objects representing Europe from non-European perspectives and things that embody "Europe" on a global scale. The focus on "glocal Europe" seeks to highlight relationality, e.g., through collecting material culture of mobility as well as objects telling the story of the global appropriation of practices emergent in European contexts.

In a recent piece on "Global Europe of Objects, Objections and Objectifications," the MEK curator Judith Schühle (2020) outlines the theme "glocal Europe" as a problem-based perspective. For Schühle, the global notion of Europe is not an aspirational slogan or a marker of recent globalisation (Hall 1991, 18), but an indicator of a long-term relationality at the heart of Europe.

Europe cannot be conceptualized without the atrocities committed under colonialism, without the structural, racist violence that continues to feed imbalances of power and unequal rights of movement and without an understanding that this background also shaped and shapes everyday life in Europe

(Schühle 2020, 37)

Acknowledging this relationality includes understanding Europe's history as a global formation based on an unequal distribution of rights and resources, steeped in the legacies of colonialism and the Holocaust. In Schühle's view, a museum of the "European everyday" cannot be uncoupled from working through Europe's violent past and its everyday afterlives today.

The recent Motion Detector display, part of MEK's object-in-focus exhibitions addressing contemporary issues, exemplifies how the glocal Europe collection theme is implemented. The 2019 "Blue Miracle" display consisted of a piece of cloth, a wooden printing block and a photograph of hands covered in blue dye. The display marked the 2018 inscription of blue-print (or indigo blue dyeing in a vat) on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as part of a joint nomination by

Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. The label attached to the Motion Detector display described the technique of blueprint as well as highlighting the history of the blue colour in Europe:

Blue is the favourite colour of many Europeans. But this has not always been the case: Only in the wake of colonization did the colour gain more importance especially in textile dyeing. Indigo (from “Indian”), the “king of colours”, was massively imported by the Dutch East India Company from the 17th century onwards. Subsequently, the (forced) production of Indigo for the European market was introduced in the Americas and Asia. In this period the craft of blue print also came from Asia to Europe and spread swiftly from Amsterdam throughout the continent.

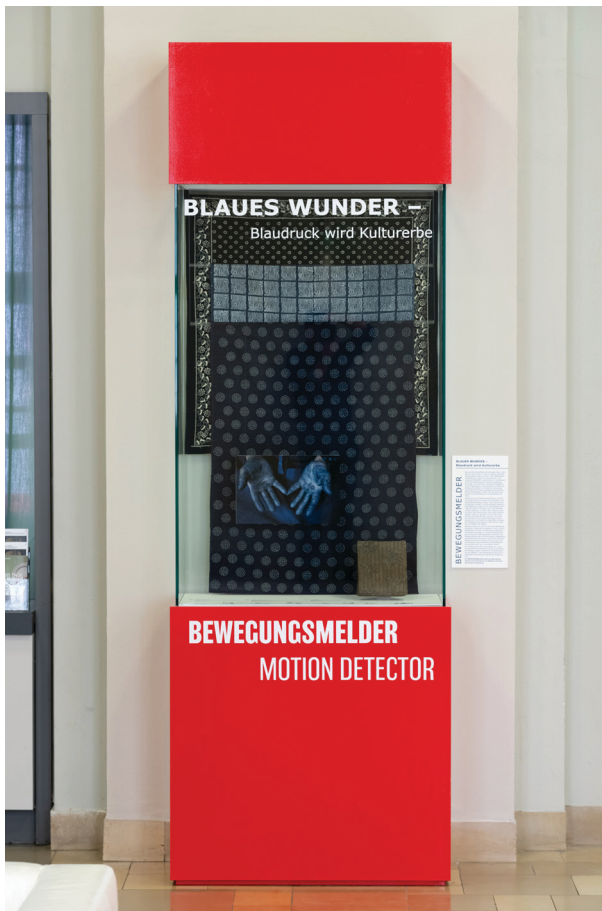


Figure 3.1 Motion Detector case at the MEK. Courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum Europäischer Kulturen. © Photo by Christian Krug.

The accompanying museum label describes how the “Blue Miracle” became a preferred colour in Europe through its global history entangled in colonial fantasies and histories of exploitation (Taussig 2009; Kumar 2016).

Rather than framing the cloth and the tool as indicators of “cultural contacts” between Europe and non-Europe, the description offers an insight into glocal Europe through the lens of the colonial trade. The availability of this colour in Europe is seen as a result of global networks of expropriation, which drove the flow of indigo dye to Europe. The artefacts in the Motion Detector display point to the ambiguity of the blueprint technique, both as a revered UNESCO-listed cultural technique imagined as “European” and as a trace of these unequal colonial relations. The museum object is animated to materialise relations between complex imperial formations, violent pasts, ambiguous encounters, and ongoing legacies of inequality. Through the glocal Europe thematic focus, the collection opens up new dimensions of relationality and “cultural contact,” shedding light on broader questions of global histories of material culture.

Displaying Things, Animating Relations

What role does exhibition-making play in manifesting the collection’s relationality? In order to investigate this question, I explore an object from the MEK’s collection through two exhibitions. The artefact of our attention here is a cream-white dress made with embroidered fabric and decorated with frills and rows of stitched satin flowers. The garment is tailored in the style of long-sleeved 1900s Jugendstil fashion and was offered to the MEK by the granddaughter of its wearer. The dress came with documentation, including a photograph of two German women, the wearer, and her daughter. They stand in front of a neoclassical building, the daughter wearing a long, high-necked white dress in a similar style and holding a bunch of flowers. The photograph is framed by the leaves of a lush palm tree. The object, acquired in 2010, is known to the curatorial team as the “Namibian dress,” as the wearer’s family lived in the former German East Africa and German Southwest Africa colonies. Since its acquisition, the dress has been loaned for two trailblazing exhibitions at the Deutsches Historisches Museum (German Historical Museum, hereafter DHM) in Berlin and the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden (hereafter DHMD). The following sections will explore what kinds of relations within the collection’s focus on glocal Europe were mediated and catalysed by displaying this dress.

The Berlin-based exhibition *German Colonialism: Fragments Past and Present* (14 Oct 2016—14 May 2017) at the DHM was a blockbuster exhibition, shedding light on the ideologies and the variety of actors involved in the project of German colonialism. The MEK’s Namibian dress was loaned for the exhibition and became part of the vast display comprising over 500 objects. The dress featured in a section addressing the colonial gender order. The display explored the heated debates on German interracial marriage and the

colonial-era “Woman Question,” or the problem of the perceived shortage of white women in the colonies (Wildenthal 2001).

As the historian Dörte Lerp highlights in the catalogue for the *German Colonialism* exhibition:

Europeans distinguished themselves from the indigenous population in the colonies through their clothing. They went to great lengths to keep their dresses and suits white and spotless

(Lerp 2016)

Exploring the historical accounts of German lives in the territories of today’s Namibia, Lerp (2016) suggests that the dress was part of the colonial gender order. Settler women were portrayed as engaged in a continuous battle with dirt and dust. They came to symbolise a gendered idea of protectors of whiteness as well as German and European values on the colonial frontier (see O’Donnell et al. 2010, Waters 2019). Everyday material culture, from dress to cuisine, partook in projections of European superiority and constructions of bourgeois and national identity (Wildenthal 2001, 21).

The DHM exhibition placed the dress within the context of gender, racial laws, and everyday practices of boundary-making between the Germans and the indigenous populations in the colonial context. This way, the MEK object was used to map this relationality of textile culture and colonial biopolitics.

The object’s materiality partook in the presentation of this relationality—the cream-white colour and the fine, lightweight material of the dress were powerful indicators of the settler colonial anxieties underpinning everyday control and exclusionary whiteness. By focusing on European mobility to colonised spaces and the material culture of this migration, the *German Colonialism* exhibition asked, in the light of MEK’s glocal Europe, how “Europeanness” was represented and performed in settlers’ everyday life. It also showed how practices emergent in Europe, such as the exclusionary notions of Europeanness and hegemonic whiteness, were implemented in daily sartorial practice. The spotless, frilly fabric placed in the context of the archival material served to tell the gendered story of German settler colonialism and its ideologies and daily practices to police boundaries of race, white supremacy, and notions of racial purity.

The dress also featured in the *Racism: The Invention of Human Races* (19 May 2018—6 Jan 2019) exhibition at the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden. This exhibition explored forms of racism and their link to the notion of “race” as an invented category for describing human differences, which serves to justify social and political inequality. Within this critical race theory framework, the Namibian dress from the MEK was featured in the exhibition’s section on the visual regimes of whiteness and racial politics in the colonial setting. The catalogue explores the colonial-era visual culture

and its widespread imagery of dressed-in-white settlers against the partial nudity of the colonised local populations.

Scholars of colonial visual culture demonstrate that the juxtaposition of clothed whiteness with the naked non-white body has proliferated in both fieldwork records and vernacular photography (Harris 1998; Rizzo 2005; Gauthier and Staszak 2012). In the depictions, the pallidity of textiles played a role in the self-staging of the whiteness of European settlers. Scholars have explored the symbolism of the white dress as a national metaphor in Germany (Confino 1997, 40). The racial demarcations in settler societies have frequently been imagined through the orders of gendered domesticity, often materialised through the presentation of textiles, including the maintenance of white linen and dress (Reagin 2001). Dress codes, as Stoler observed (1989), were part of colonial material culture embedded in a range of practices of distinction which:

did more than reiterate middle-class European visions and values. They were reactive to class tensions in the metropole, and created what Benedict Anderson calls a “tropical gothic,” a “middle-class aristocracy” that cultivated the colonials’ differences from the colonized, while maintaining social distinctions among themselves

(Stoler 1989, 137)

This way, dress practices were an integral part of forging new constructions of Europeaness in the colonial setting. This was a relational construction, continuously shaped by both colonial power regimes and everyday practices, such as ordering, wearing, and maintaining white textiles or staging whiteness in vernacular colonial photography.

Michael Taussig reflected on the iconic images of anthropology’s visual archive to show that juxtaposition can be part of a carefully staged choreography of ethnographic whiteness (2009, 123). For example, the coloniality of the juxtaposition between Malinowski and the sorcerer, as the ethnographer and the subject of ethnography, was both visual and sartorial. The performance of ethnographic whiteness encompassed differences in dress and the racialised body. Although the practice of juxtaposition can be a powerful tool of knowledge production in exhibition practice, it is implicated in the long-term legacies of often racialised visual politics of difference.

Juxtaposition as a means of making knowledge by exploring differences has a long history within a range of visual and material practices outside of the museum. Anthropologists have long deployed the method of juxtaposition as a way of staging difference or initiating critique, at times playful, of one’s own social order (Banerjee and Linstead 2004; Hall 2010). For the museum theorist Mieke Bal (2006), juxtaposition is a key building block of the language used within the walls of a museum. It is a crucial part of the repertoire of curatorial tools which come together to form the curator’s argument for specific signifying effects. Visual culture scholarship, often inspired

by surrealism or Walter Benjamin's notion of dialectical image, led to surprising visual arguments. In *Dreamworld and Catastrophe* by Susan Buck-Morss, the juxtaposed, visual fragments of the past are "made to speak to each other" (2002, 176). As Buck-Morss (2002, 68) reminds us, staging such new constellations of meaning, we need to remember that the meaning is always ambivalent and all interpretations are only partial. Thinking through this partiality and the situated reading of exhibition displays allows us to reflect on the varying effects of the manifestations of relationality on display, particularly in the context of curatorial arguments (Bal 2006) made using visual juxtaposition.

In the *Racism* exhibition, the cream-white dress, once allegedly covering the body of a German settler in Namibia, was placed next to a figure of a "Micronesia" woman. The figure depicting the "Micronesia" adolescent girl was produced in 1939 on the basis of visual material from the Hamburg South Seas expedition of 1909. The large-scale, extensive project of salvage anthropology involved short-term visits to several islands, resulting in over 1500 photographs, 6000 collected objects, and 100 voice recordings (Berg 1988; Penny 2002). Outlining the benefits of the expedition to Hamburg's Scientific Foundation, Georg Thilenius highlighted the possibility of obtaining numerous photographs and anthropometric measurements (Buschmann 2008, 79). The discourse of salvage anthropology and rescue missions aimed at preindustrial, ahistorical, so-called "natural peoples" ("Naturvölker") were part of a widespread fascination with evolutionary approaches seeking to record what was considered as "earlier stages of human development" (Habermas 2020, 364). This documentation of the disappearing world was often undertaken by any means possible, and members of the South Sea Expedition also:

pursued a policy of "anonymous purchase", leaving tobacco or some other form of payment in place of objects taken while their owners were not present, and they have stressed that the scientists on this expedition sometimes turned to more violent methods of intimidation and deception as well

(Penny 2002, 100)

The visual record of the expedition, including photographic portraits and group depictions of the local populations, should be understood in the context of objectification and rendering colonial bodies knowable without seeking the subjects' consent. Examining the objects and images obtained in the course of the South Sea Expedition necessitates paying attention to the unequal and exploitative nature of the acquisition encounter. It was embedded in unethical research practices, as the team obtained data with difficulty (Laukötter 2011, 188). This includes the visual documentation of the expedition, which was part of the context of deception and coercion.

In a detailed analysis of the object, Kremmler and Berner (forthcoming) argue that the “Micronesian” sculpture represents an abstraction rather than a representation of any particular woman encountered by the members of the expedition. The sculpture was first displayed during the 1939 German Colonial Exhibition (Deutsche Kolonial-Ausstellung) in Dresden as part of a group presentation of Nazi racial typology. The “Micronesian” figure was featured in the display of the “three great human races” (understood in Nazi terms as Negroid, Caucasoid, and Mongoloid) in the exhibition group context, and thus the global racial matrix of Nazi colonial revisionism (Kremmler and Berner forthcoming). The sculpture, as an artificial creation composed of many images and represented subjects, bears the mark of the South Sea Expedition encounter and the lingering history of the colonial visual aesthetics as well as its national socialist afterlives. Apprehending the figure as a lingering colonial history requires paying attention to the complex, assembled materiality of the object, as well as to the ways in which it is animated through relationality.

This visual continuity has been traced by Dr. Natasha A. Kelly, an artist and sociologist who was part of a BIPOC expert group; she was invited for consultation on the *Racism* exhibition at DHMD. In a 2021 interview with me, Kelly explored this contradiction in the example of the dress and the figure. For Kelly, the juxtaposition of the figure and the dress on display, while attempting to challenge the politics of racialisation, risked perpetuating the problematic representational practice of juxtaposition. The Namibian dress represented a woman rendered as very asexual, pure, and Victorian, with a fully covered body. This was a symbol of gendered whiteness and white innocence. Reflecting on this visual trope, Kelly observed that instead, the object could have been mobilised in a different relational configuration. For Kelly, the dress was a mark of a different, condensed relationality—the German woman’s constant struggle for purity, domesticity, and whiteness (Reagin 2006). By speculatively placing the dress “in the context of ongoing coloniality,” the object could have highlighted complex intersections of race, gender, and class.

The use of the dress as an indicator of exclusionary whiteness in the exhibition space raises questions about the effects of exhibition arguments made with the tool of juxtaposition and the associated relationality on display. As discussed in the above section, coloniality is often performed using visual juxtaposition (Gauthier and Staszak 2012). The anthropologist Heidy Geismar (2013) suggests that the aesthetics of juxtaposition might have a flattening effect. To make visible relations and networks, juxtaposition reduces objects’ specific qualities. This can lead to obliterating the histories and contexts of artefacts on display. Examining the work of juxtaposition in a Berlin-based exhibition entitled *Beyond Compare: Art from Africa* in the Bode Museum (Unvergleichlich: Kunst aus Afrika) co-curated by the Ethnological Museum and Bode Museum, Onuoha (2022) demonstrated that juxtaposition might have an ambivalent or even contradictory effect. While

the exhibition sought to problematise binaries and institutional distinctions, *Beyond Compare* reinforced some of the underpinning dichotomies. Rather than equalising, this might lead to reifying categories as well as reinscribing the underlying Eurocentric perceptions of the objects on display.

According to Kelly, positioning the dress next to the figure of the “Micronesia” in the exhibition space at DHMD perpetuated the visual tropes of hypersexualised women of colour. Juxtaposed with the modest dress, the naked “Micronesia” appeared to Kelly as overtly eroticised. Kelly had a strong, visceral reaction to the display. Although the object aimed to represent a model of a racialised “Micronesia” female body rather than any particular person, the figure’s detailed depiction of female genitalia, e.g., of the girl’s nipple, appeared as verging on paedophilia. For Kelly, an intervention in the exhibition was necessary to break away from the juxtaposition, revert the visitor’s gaze and “rescue the girl” from pornographic hypervisibility.

Kelly’s concern for the “Micronesia” girl led to her intervention in the DHMD’s exhibition space (Kelly and Bo 2018). This involved veiling the figure with a textile screen and projecting a poem onto its surface. The installation aimed to redirect the visitor’s gaze away from the disturbing, excessive bodily detail of a figure representing a child of colour. Instead, the poem’s text drew attention to the nature of the gaze as a form of sexual assault, and the casting of the figure as a Eurocentric projection. Kelly’s intervention into the exhibition space highlighted that the dress-figure constellation not only reproduced the juxtaposition between racialised subjects, but also perpetuated the long-standing visual trope of a dichotomy between natural (“Naturvölker”) and cultural peoples (“Kulturvölker”) (Penny 2002, 23).

According to Kelly, as “racism interfaces with what we see,” one can rarely notice one’s blind spots. During the interview, we discussed the veil as a metaphor for double consciousness or the regime of visibility in which people of colour are “always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois 1997, 39). Coined by the sociologist W.E.B. du Bois in his seminal work, entitled *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), the notion of double consciousness was initially applied to the US colour line or the African-American experience in a segregated society (see Savory 1972; Kelly 2016, 2019). Kelly pointed to life behind the veil as a simultaneous experience of obscurity and hypervisibility. Reflecting on this ambiguity, Kelly highlighted the ongoing dichotomy perpetuated in exhibition contexts between representing BIPOC as collectives and rendering white bodies as individuals. This dichotomy was perpetuated in the juxtaposition of the “Micronesia” female type figure and the individual dress.

The case of the Namibian dress in the two exhibitions demonstrates the different ways in which the object’s “glocal Europe” relations were animated. In the *Colonialism* exhibition at DHM, the delicate, frilly garment brought

to the fore the embodied project of racial purity in the domestic sphere. The materiality of the dress was used to reveal the entangled histories of gender and coloniality and the “unsettling truths about settling” (Waters 2019). In the *Racism* exhibition at DHMD, the object was juxtaposed with another artefact from the Dresden-based museum collection. The ambiguity of the juxtaposition as a particular spectral relation was addressed in Kelly’s rescue mission.

Rescue Missions and Blind Spots

Why would the artist and scholar wish to “rescue” the Melanesian girl, given that the sculpture was most likely not a depiction of any given person? To understand this intervention, I turn to the anthropological studies of relations and relatedness as well as ethnographic research on kinship. Work on kinship sheds light on how persons relate to each other and how kinship terms establish relations of obligation, shared responsibility and reciprocity (Schneider 1984; Strathern 1992). Scholars have illustrated that kinship is mutable and, rather than a static state, constitutes a range of practices and expressions of connectedness (Carsten 2000). Beyond the biological essence of kinship, this scholarship explored relatedness as processual and social, continuously shaped through mutuality of being and a range of everyday actions such as nurturing and care, solidarity or guardianship (McKinnon 2016; Whyte 2021).

In ethnographic studies, fictive kinship has long explored a multiplicity of kinship ties and processes of kin-making beyond biological relationships of descent and affinity (Carsten 2004; Leyton 2018). Rather than opposed to “real” kinship, the idea of “fictive” kinship allows us to account for relations that might socially be unrecognised as kin, for example, in relations between people and things. Scholars of gift exchange have demonstrated that in several ethnographic contexts, things might be mobilised to stand for or be equated with persons (e.g., Strathern 1985; Sahlins 2011). Indigenous and feminist scholars have long argued for extending the definition of kin to other-than-human persons (Graham 1999; Yates 2021). For Tynan (2021), relationality is configured around responsibility, declaring that “connections between entities are more important than the entities themselves” (2021, 603). Relationality emerges as living practice interlinking knowledge production, ethics, and care. Making kin involves shaping unlikely relations to “stitch together collaborations without worrying overmuch about ontological kinds” (Haraway 2016, 136). This way, kinship emerges as a practice of world-making, bringing things, whether systems or concepts, into being (Lythberg, McCarthy and Salmon 2019, 7).

The notion of kinship with other-than-human persons has recently become a significant part of the debates on the politics of recognition, restitution and repatriation of cultural heritage (Krmopotich 2010; Kirsch 2011; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Powell 2012; Nash 2018). Lehrer (2020) proposes the

notion of material kin to think about different relations between objects and diverse stakeholders. As Kim TallBear recently argued, “making kin is making people into familiars in order to relate” (2019, 37). Drawing on TallBear, Bell (2022) advocates for kin-making in the collection as an opening into a range of ontological and political perspectives on the objects, providing new possibilities of action against the politics of racialisation. For Bell, kinship involves a certain rawness, animating “the affective qualities of things that are intensely intimate and thread through various scales” (Bell 2022, 74).

Kelly’s intervention in the exhibition demonstrates how such ideas of kin-making can be practised within collections. Her initial response to the juxtaposed dress and the “Micronesian” figure illustrates the “rawness” of working with the collection. Kelly’s reaction to the display was raw on different levels, from the response to the detailed modelling of the body to how the display appeared to reinscribe the colonality of vision. Kelly’s modification to the exhibition makes visible the relationships of colonial visibility as well as the way in which curating is implicated in a field of complex, historical relations (Bell 2022, 75). Animating kinship in the display disrupts the juxtaposition and breaks down the troubling visual tropes.

Conclusion: Making Kin in the Collection

Judith Schühle (2020) explores the theme of “global Europe” from a problem-based perspective. For Schühle, the concept of global Europe is not merely an aspirational slogan or a reflection of recent globalisation (Hall 1991, 18). Instead, it serves as an indicator of a long-standing interconnectedness at the core of Europe.

Europe cannot be conceptualized without the atrocities committed under colonialism, without the structural, racist violence that continues to feed imbalances of power and unequal rights of movement and without an understanding that this background also shaped and shapes everyday life in Europe

(Schühle 2020, 37)

Recognising this relationality entails understanding Europe’s history as a global construct rooted in an unequal distribution of rights and resources, deeply influenced by the legacies of colonialism and the Holocaust. From Schühle’s perspective, a museum dedicated to the European everyday cannot be divorced from the process of addressing Europe’s violent past and its enduring impact on contemporary society.

As collections are understood as bundles of relations (Bell 2017), exhibition practices aim to animate various dimensions of relationality. However, the relationships inherent in objects are never static, given or merely to be

unveiled. Instead, the interconnectedness of collections remains in a state of constant flux, shaped and reshaped by ongoing interactions among, people, things, historical developments, and their enduring legacies. Curators possess a long-established toolkit for relationship-building that incorporates exhibition-making and participatory methods of understanding and forging connections. For instance, juxtaposing objects on display opens up new avenues for knowledge, enabling curators to construct intricate and compelling visual narratives. Nevertheless, as scholars like Geismar (2013) and Onuoha (2022) have illustrated, such curatorial relationship-building may also reinforce hierarchies of knowledge. It can flatten relationships and expose curatorial blind spots that both obscure and unveil enduring power dynamics.

The chapter offers a glimpse into animating the relationality of collections through the story of one dress. Following the object and its counterpart on display offers insights into the exhibition effects mobilised by the MEK's theme of "glocal Europe." Kelly's work invites us to imagine that reframing museum objects through relatedness can be a tool for challenging the forms of power and knowledge that persist within museum practice about certain object and social relations. It critiques curatorial engagements with collections, aiming to foster accountability and inspire change. This work exemplifies the potential of engaging in a relational approach with museum collections through the lens of kin-making.

When we embrace collections as material kin, as Erica Lehrer suggests (2020, 303), we have the opportunity to reimagine not only our connection to the objects but also our relations to one another. In line with this perspective, Whyte (2021, 52) emphasises that kinship fosters interdependence through the shared acceptance of responsibilities, which are imbued with qualities like trust, consent, and reciprocity. Kin-making is always a challenging, affectively charged, and porous relation of shared responsibility (Bell 2022; Whyte 2021). The practice of kin-making with collections involves a set of obligations for the museum to:

recognize both the legacies and the possibilities of our work toward the continued work of repair, restitution, and the building and sustaining of relations in and outside of museums

(Bell 2022, 76)

By incorporating kin-making into their curatorial toolkit, museums can embark on a productive journey to reshape their relationships with their collections. In this way, kinship offers new insights into the collection and the museum's role in fostering relations. This approach holds the potential to inform and broaden collection priorities, such as the exploration of "glocal Europe" in the MEK's case, while also aiming to realign the museum with the ongoing struggles for epistemic and social justice.

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Part II

Constructions of Cultural Heritage and Property Disputes



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4 Cultural Heritage from Colonial Context as Disputed Heritage

The Case of Cameroon and Germany

Richard Tsogang Fossi

Introduction

In the first week of November 2022, His Royal Highness Sehm Mbinglo I, Paramount Fon of the Nso kingdom in Cameroon, visited the Humboldt Forum in Berlin, where one of his kingdom's assets is located. *Ngonnso*—a beaded anthropomorphic sculpture acting as Founder-Mother of the Nso community long before the colonial conquest from 1884—was taken to Germany in 1902, after the king's palace was plundered and set ablaze. Before the Fon's visit, the director of the SPK—Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation—had promised to return the sculpture. On 11 June 2023, another king from Cameroon, Sultan Muhammed-Nabil Mbombo Njoya, also visited the Humboldt Forum, where the renowned throne *Mandu Yenu* of his great-grandfather, Ibrahim Njoya, is exhibited. The attitudes of the two monarchs towards these *entities*—*Ngonnso* and *Mandu Yenu*—may reveal the way they regard that patrimony: while Fon Sehm performed some rites to thank and appease the Nso ancestors for keeping *Ngonnso* and making her return possible, Sultan Muhammed-Nabil sat on the throne of his ancestor taken to Berlin since 1908, without bothering to exoticise himself¹ (Figure 4.1). Nevertheless, their gestures raise questions related to the ownership of *entities* in exile as regards the illegal circumstances of their removal.

Moreover, Sultan Muhammed-Nabil's gesture, which was echoed beyond Germany's borders, once again raises the question of “donations” in a colonial context. In fact, during their colonisation of “Cameroon” 1884–1914/19, the Germans removed more than 60,000 artefacts of which more than 40,000 are present in the German museums today. These are made up of sacred, dynastic *entities*, and also artefacts of every use, designated as purchase, gift or plunder (see Assilkinga et al. 2023). As most of these “acquisitions” are marked by violence, many communities of origin have been calling for their return for decades (see Savoy 2021). In the eyes of the communities of origin, the displacement of their cultural goods does not entail loss of *ownership*. Moreover, the call for cooperation, participation, circulation, or negotiation, as is stated in the German Museum Association Guidelines on how to deal with collections from

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Figure 4.1 © Photo by Marc Eils.

colonial contexts (German Museum Association 2018), may also imply the factual recognition of a problematic presence of many *entities* in German Museums (ibid., 6). Based on some instances, like the Kum’a Mbape’s—alias Lock Priso—“Tangué” in Munich, the *Ngomso* in the Humboldt Forum in Berlin, some Nso royal artefacts in Stuttgart, and the throne *Mandu Yenu*, this article investigates if the concept of “shared heritage” (see Thiemayer 2018) is appropriate to discuss their status and their relational potential. In this regard, the analysis draws on the distinction between the German terms “Besitz” (possession) and “Eigentum” (ownership), which are also found in the French “possession” and “propriété” as two main relations towards an object or rather to other persons about a given object. In the given case, “Besitz” refers to the fact of *possessing* something without necessarily being its *owner*, whereas “Eigentum” goes beyond the mere possession and entails an absolute right over the object, even when it might be *possessed* by a third person (see Angehrn 1989). *Possession* may thus be a more factual

relation to an object, whereas *ownership* may be a more legal one. Drawing on these concepts—*shared heritage*, *possession*, *ownership*—this contribution hypothesises that many artefacts removed during colonial times are not “shared heritage,” i.e., in the sense of a mutual benefit.

Colonial Context and Translocation of Artefacts: Some Ways of Removal

Before 1884, a few cultural items, Eurocentrically termed “curiosities,” had already been brought to Europe by some travellers. The Schlagintweits, who went to India around 1865, reportedly brought about 40,000 ethnological items to Germany, but people were almost indifferent to them (see Habermas 2021). This lack of interest quickly changed in the wake of the colonial scramble for Africa in the 1880s, with a drastic increase in the number of cultural assets, as well as zoological and botanical collections, transported to the Western metropolises (see Hecht 1968). There were many methods of extraction and accumulation, the most frequent being so-called punitive expeditions. This term was used from 1892 onwards (see Künkler 2022, 15) to veil illegal aggressions on the local communities; they particularly gave way to systematic cultural plunders (see LeGall 2023), cattle and skeletal parts of assassinated ancestors, dehumanisingly termed *human remains*. As a result, military men such as Adolf Schipper, von Stein zu Lausnitz, etc. were at the top of the list of looters. An account by Lieutenant Hans Dominik of his first expedition to Abo-land in 1894 reads as follows:

Zum ersten Male hatte ich die Bestie im Menschen entfesselt gesehen und noch stand ich unter dem Eindruck all des Grausigen, als die ersten Patrouillen, die den fliehenden in den Wald nachgesetzt waren, jubelnd mit allen möglichen Beutestücken beladen, eintrafen und meldeten, wie sie im dichten Walde mit dem Feinde handgemein geworden waren

(Dominik 1901, 36)²

Colonial administrators, whether governors or station and district chiefs, provided the museums. Governor Eugen von Zimmerer, for instance, “gifted” more than 170 items to the Museum Fünf Kontinente in Munich. Traders were also very active, like Adolf Diehl, who dwelled in the colony from 1899 to 1912 and removed more than 4000 cultural items, partly obtained from military expeditions (see Tsogang 2023c, 378–379). One of his letters to Karl Weule, director of the Grassi Museum in Leipzig, reads:

Es freut mich Ihrem Schreiben entnehmen zu können, dass die letzte Sammlung gefallen hat. Ganz wunderschöne Sachen habe ich jetzt vom Banzoi Feldzug erhalten. Hauptsächlich Bronzen (Pfeifen, Trinkbecher, Glocken, etc.). Hauptmann Glauning hat abermals mächtig gesammelt, wie ich vermute aber für Berlin. Vor einigen Tagen kam erst wieder ein Lasttransport in Tinto durch, darunter die Kriegstrommel von

Banzoi – dieselbe wurde von 21 Leuten getragen – eine kleine Photographie davon lege ich bei.³

Travellers, scientists, and artists such as Bernhard Ankermann, Franck Thorbecke, and his wife Marie Pauline each took with them around 1500 cultural objects, some of which they had received as gifts from looting soldiers. Colonial doctors like Theodor Berké or Paul Hösemann, planters like Georg A. Zenker, removed hundreds each of cultural items and human skeletal parts. Missionaries such as Jakop Keller, Harris Richardson, and Wilhelm Müller not only collected numerous objects for public institutions and missions, but also actively destroyed much of the local culture in the name of conversion to Christianity and the fight against so-called demonic or pagan practices (see Tsogang 2023b). Occasional or permanent networks were also set up, systematising extraction, transport, and shipping. Museum directors or heads of department, such as Felix von Luschan of the Museum für Völkerkunde (today Ethnological Museum) and Count Carl von Linden of the Linden Museum in Stuttgart, Karl Weule of the Grassi Museum in Leipzig, were in constant contact with officers and colonialists in the field, and insisted on receiving the booty (see LeGall 2023). Members of learned societies, such as Dr Eugen Zintgraff, who collected more than 600 objects from Cameroon between 1886 and 1897, also proved to be global players in the removal of objects and insects, and in the networking of other object collectors and home institutions (see Michels 2021). The diagram below shows these networks (Figure 4.2).

In addition, the “conditions of peace” established by the conquerors after a colonial war encouraged the forced removal of artefacts and other objects. After the aggression against the sultanate of Tibati in today’s Adamaua Region of Cameroon, the German commander of the “Schutztruppe,” Captain Oltwig von Kamptz, requested from the deposed Sultan Mohammad the payment of 200–300 elephant tusks and 500 cattle, whereby 38 huge elephant tusks, regalia, coats of arms, Koran editions, 500 cows, and 500 donkeys, as well as more than 30 people had already been captured and 300 others killed (see Temgoua 1994). Nevertheless, the strong demand for material culture in this context of commodification and commoditisation also led to local production or a change of attitude for commercial purposes (see Thorbecke 1914, 54). In addition, the harassing tax system has also forced people to get rid of certain cultural entities that they would have liked to keep.

These examples illustrate the diverse circumstances in which colonial collecting took place, from commercial transactions to outright illegal acquisitions such as looting, smuggling, intimidation, confiscation, and extortion (see Lundén 2016, 108–110), thus making the *entities* highly “sensitive” (see Berner 2011) in at least a twofold way: cultural sensitivity—religious *entities*, power objects—, and historical sensitivity—because of violence, trick, theft, threat, and death.⁴ Religious entities, regalia and thrones were rarely given or sold willingly because they embodied the soul of the community.



Figure 4.2 © Diagram by Richard Tsogang Fossi.

As a result, the presence of this heritage in Europe has fuelled debate on the question of acquisition and ownership.

Contested Ownership, Queries for Restitution, Symbolic Reappropriation

In the 1960s and 1970s in particular, there were many calls for the restitution of Africa's colonial heritage. However, a sacred lizard stone—known as Numonia—taken by Hans H. Schomburgk in Liberia and donated to the Museum für Völkerkunde (today Ethnological Museum), was at the heart of one such request since 1924.⁵ Nevertheless, many claims for restitution were rather derided by the former colonisers (see Savoy 2021, 12), in contrast to artworks seized by the Nazis (see Lundèn 2016, 109). Ironically, for several decades, only a few parts of this cultural heritage, removed in the name of

science, have been exhibited (see Savoy 2023), or loaned among Western museums, but scarcely ever were shown on African soil despite the demands. Relationships have thus been established between Western nations on the subject of African cultural heritage, without including the Africans themselves, as was the case at the Berlin-Congo-Conference in 1884/85. Instead, the West manoeuvred to counter or undermine cooperation or restitution queries. Accordingly, in France, Great Britain, and Belgium, many artefacts captured in colonial times were transferred from the museums' *possession* to the state's *ownership*, making them "inalienable" (see Savoy 2021, 13). On the German side, the demands were rejected as unfounded (Savoy 2021, 76). Meanwhile, on the African side, intellectuals and museum workers like Ekpo Eyo, journalists like Paulin-Joachim, film-makers like Nii Kwato Owoo, statesmen like Mobutu Sesse Seko, and members of UNESCO like Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, fought tirelessly for cooperation and restitution. Even today, many entities appear as tokens of colonial violence, fuelling discussions about their rightful owners and the need to return them in order to break the long chain of violence and persistent colonial, epistemic, and racist dispossession (Hicks 2021, 3–4), and to start new relational ethics (Sarr and Savoy 2018).

One of the first examples of Cameroon's disputed heritage is the "Tangué," a ship's prow looted from "Duala" in December 1884 (Figure 4.3). About



Figure 4.3 © Photo by Yrine Matchinda.

5 months after the signing of the protectorate treaty between certain Duala proto-nations along the Wuri river and the German merchants Eduard Schmidt and Johannes Voß (11–12 July 1884) (see Kum’a Ndumbe III 2008), the first German colonial war was launched against chief Lock Priso of Hickory Town (today’s Bonaberi). King Bell Ndumb’a Lobe, one of the signatories, had convinced the Germans that Lock Priso was his vassal. As a result, they unilaterally hoisted their flag on his territory. By end of July 1884, Lock Priso had urged the Germans to remove it. Yet, his protestation did not meet with a positive response.⁶ At the peak of the Berlin Conference (Nov 1884–Feb 1885), the first German colonial war was already under way in Duala, with the German marine opposed to the allied Lock Priso’s people and Joss people, a sub-family of the Bell. The German Admiral, Eduard von Knorr, set Lock Priso’s headquarters ablaze after a systematic plundering by Max Buchner, who removed Lock Priso’s Tangué and sent it to the museum of his hometown Munich.⁷

For many years, this “Tangué” was exhibited in the former ethnological museum of Munich, where Max Buchner also worked as director from 1887 until 1907 (see Deesbach 2007). In the 1990s, Kum’a Ndumbe III, a grandson of Lock Priso Bell, found more information about its existence and provenance and issued demands for restitution (Spletstößer 2019, 17). However, Kum’a Ndumbe III, who has positioned himself as his grandfather’s legitimate successor (Kum’a Ndumbe III 2004) to the detriment of His Majesty Mbape Milord, the reigning chief of the Bele Bele, has claimed a status that is not officially recognised by the local chief.⁸ The case of the Tangué epitomises the complexity of the plundered entities that shape multifaceted and tense relationships in the postcolonial context with regard to property within the same community and beyond the borders of the State: beyond the struggles for recognition and redress of colonial wrongs (Kum’a Ndumbe III 2019), the legitimacy of the person seeking justice in his or her own community and in the recipient country is called into question. The question now is: how can the non-return, in the museum’s mantra, be legitimised by the inability of local communities to look after their heritage, or by the claim that Kum’a Ndumbe III might be a usurper? What is more worrying, as Kum reveals, is that the museum once offered to make a copy for him, but at his own expense. In this case, is the museum—as the recipient of the loot—righting colonial wrongs or retraumatising the victims? Where does the museum get the legitimacy to keep the loot with impunity?

Another example of contested heritage concerns the Nso dynastic and sacred entities: Ngonnso, a sculpture in Berlin, and other royal objects adorned with beads currently on display at the Linden Museum in Stuttgart and the J.G. University in Mainz (Figure 4.4). The *Ngonnso* was taken to Berlin in 1902 by the commander of German colonial troops, Oberstleutnant Kurt von Pavel,⁹ most probably as part of an agreement with Hans Houben. In 1901, Pavel had been commissioned by Governor von Puttkamer to subdue the “unruly” kingdoms of Bangwa, Bafut, and Mankon in Grassland.



Figure 4.4 *Ngonnso*, © Photo by Cornilius Refem Fogah.

Lieutenant Houben's "punitive expedition" against the Nso in June 1902 did not correspond to Pavel's brief presence in Kumbo in December 1901, en route to Garua and the Lake Chad region. After subjugating the populations there, he returned to the coast from June to August 1902 (see Zimmermann 1909, 228). However, in that same period—June 4–9—Lieutenant Houben fought the Nso and set the palace ablaze, after plundering it. About 51 Nso people were killed; the elephant tusks of the Fon were buried by the looters to await porters.¹⁰ However, Houben did not say a single word about *Ngonnso* and more than 50 other artefacts and royal objects in his report.¹¹ Pavel, who gifted *Ngonnso* to Berlin, claimed that he had obtained the sacred figure by "purchase or exchange" (Splettstößer 2019, 288). Nevertheless, *Ngonnso* clearly belonged to the same group of Houben's booty before Pavel received her (Figure 4.5). In this context, Pavel is known to have behaved like a gang leader, always keen to get the largest possible share of his raiding parties.¹² The medical doctor Maximilian Zupitza, a member of Pavel's Bangwa-Bafut-Tschadsee-Expedition, who also removed about 124 artefacts from the colony, said: "As the leader of the expedition and commander of the troop, he [Pavel] naturally received the lion's share of all the things as well as the most beautiful ones [...] [translation by the author]".¹³

The *Ngonnso* case has been at the heart of the struggles between the Nso people, the museum and the SPK in Berlin since the 1990s. Recently, in June 2022, the SPK made an unprecedented promise to restore the figure of the founding mother (see Atabong 2022). However, this decision was taken unilaterally and seems "problematic" (see Fogha 2023). The German side does not seem to recognise the violent context in which the Nso people were



Figure 4.5 A group of Fon's personal objects from the list of Houben, on display at the Linden Museum, Stuttgart. © Photo by Richard Tsogang Fossi, May 2022.

dispossessed of Ngonnso, making restitution more an act of benevolence than a desire to take the evil seriously, which implies an apology for the trauma. From this perspective, an unsuspecting decolonising gaze remains far from the target, and forms of epistemic violence continue to subtly manifest themselves. Consequently, the fear is not so much the absence of Ngonso in Nso or other entities in other parts of Cameroon, but the lack of awareness of how the formerly colonised are being continually “zombified.”

The Mandu Yenu throne (Figure 4.6), which the Germans first saw in 1902, also comes into the picture. Although it is still considered a gift in Germany, it appears to be a case of extortion and “political expropriation or swindling”.¹⁴ A photo of Njoya's throne taken in 1902 and one published in 1905 in the Brunswick-based colonial magazine *Globus* aroused frenetic interest in German museums in Berlin, Stuttgart, and Leipzig. They were constantly on the lookout for authenticity, but also for “masterpieces” to prove the highest artistic level that supposedly backward societies could attain (see Ankermann 1914). Luschan therefore commissioned Colonial officer Hans Glauning, head of the Bamenda station, to remove the throne; Governor Theodor Seitz and missionary Martin Göhring also played a role in the process. Luschan proposed a sum of 1000 marks for this and, in passing, suggested replacing the throne with a fake—a “facsimile”—or even replacing it with one of the German Kaiser's stools. Njoya said he feared the curse of his ancestors, but it did not call for respect for the culture and beliefs of others and the removal of the throne remained the main target.¹⁵



Figure 4.6 *Mandu Yenu*, Humboldt Forum Berlin. © Photo by Richard Tsogang Fossi.

Finally, on the eve of the Kaiser's birthday in Buea on 27 February 1908, Njoya who, under relentless pressure, had promised the Kaiser a similar new throne, personally transported his father Nsangou's coveted throne to Buea and handed it over to Governor Seitz for the Kaiser, on the grounds that the new throne could not be completed in time. Pastor Göhring had also persuaded him to do so. Some pressing questions here are: Why did the Germans behave as if the Kaiser was not to survive after his birthday? What's to stop the "gift" from waiting? Is a "gift" with deadline a real gift? The recipient country prefers to see a sign of diplomatic relations in this gesture and that Njoya did not want to lose face, forgetting Njoya's condition as a vassal, i.e., a ruler whose survival depends on his degree of obedience to the master. This also meant that Njoya, like other subjugated kings, did not have the right to declare war, but rather the unshakeable duty to stand by the colonial regime to fight resistant communities. Conversely, a vassal could be expelled by his master: This was the case during the military campaign against the neighbouring Nso community in 1906, when Glauning unilaterally expelled Njoya and his warriors, ironically on the grounds of extreme

violence!¹⁶ Moreover, can one imagine a German emperor himself carrying his most precious and sacred throne to Napoleon as a sign of friendship and diplomatic relations? The German colonial administration therefore never saw Njoya as an autonomous monarch in the sense of equality,¹⁷ just an obsequious “N*könig” who had made the choice to obey and live rather than to resist and die. Governor von Puttkamer himself called it “intelligence” or “wisdom” to recognise the “master and the strongest” and to bow down to him (see Puttkamer 1912, 42), as opposed to the so-called unruly kings, who were mercilessly fought, captured, exiled, heavily fined, sentenced to forced labour, or executed (see Tsogang, 2023d, 402–403). Lastly, even Njoya never saw himself as an autonomous sovereign in the face of the Germans, who brutalised the women, including Na, Njoya’s mother, with no concern for the defenceless monarch. The most pathetic proof of this powerlessness came a few years later, when Rudolf Duala Manga, king of the Bell-Duala, sent him a messenger, Ndame, to ask for help against the Germans, who were expropriating the Duala from their ancestral lands on the banks of the Wuri. Njoya, who had sufficiently witnessed the ruthlessness of the Germans towards resistant or so-called disloyal kings, refused his support for fear of being executed. To this day, this fact is particularly well recorded in Cameroon’s collective and literary memory. It reads:

The Germans are my masters, may they do well or ill to me, I remain loyal to them... I, Njoja, know that if I give my name to the cause, and the Germans hear it, they will seize me together with Manga and Fonjonge and kill me, because we broke loyalty to the Emperor [translation by the author].¹⁸

Ironically, Duala Manga was sentenced to death for high treason and hanged on 8 August 1914. Njoya’s throne is an eloquent symbol of asymmetrical colonial power relations, which calls into question the understanding of “gift” as a mark of joy. Njoya made his gift while “weeping,” but his feelings (see Tsogang 2023a, 71–72) were not important, because the only acceptable destiny for a vassal is to satisfy his master.

Disputed Heritage, “Shared Heritage”?

To return to my preliminary question on “shared heritage,” it is clear that we are, today, still confronted with the multiple legacies of colonialism. As for the specific case of the cultural entities removed during colonisation, the lack of knowledge or unequal access to them and to archives for the production of knowledge, the fact that only one party manages the collections and monopolises the right to exhibit them or not to exhibit them—all of this remains a huge challenge to the objective of decolonising museums for the advent of a postcolonial museum, as the title of a book suggests (see Brus, Knecht and Zillinger 2011). And what about entities contaminated by

chemicals, or which have lost their biography and are now simply registered as NO NAME: Are they still a desirable heritage? Entities from colonial contexts, often presented as “shared heritage,” i.e., for the mutual benefit of the communities of origin and the recipient countries, seem to be nothing of the sort; they have become objects of dispute, not communion. Judging by this standard, they would have been “shared” in the case of a consensual clarification of their provenance and ownership (see Thiemayer 2018, 37), a consensual decision on where they belong or live, as well as equal rights and opportunities for research and exhibition, or the sharing of material, financial, or symbolic gains. The hegemony of colonially inherited structures, the persistence of epistemic injustice and violence cannot be shaken, broken or overcome just by hollow-ringing phrases (see Barkan and Karn 2006), nor by spectacularly renaming former ethnological museums, while colonially and racially generated privileges of the global North remain frustratingly prevalent.

Visa policies, which do not always encourage unrestricted mobility of experts from the communities of origin, are another point that calls into question the idea of “shared heritage.” Some partner museums do what they can to enable an exchange of views by inviting colleagues from the countries of origin for research to displace the predominant Western view, but we should also consider doing it in the opposite direction for the sake of equality. However, a restrictive visa policy leads to frustration and reinforces the idea of a confiscated or hidden heritage rather than a shared heritage. For example, in 2022, Cameroonian academics were refused visas for Germany. Ironically, they had been invited to complete a 2-year transnational research project on the colonial collection of Rittmeister Max von Stetten¹⁹ in today’s Museum Fünf Kontinente in Munich.²⁰ Thus, even in the era of prevailing ideas about the decolonisation of museums and North–South relations, and in the perspective of a new relational ethic, researchers from the South still have to take medication for high blood pressure before applying for a visa due to the stress that comes along with this process. In this context, the romanticism of museums as “contact zones” or of cultural heritage from the colonial context as “shared” seems like chasing rainbows. Today again, the unfortunate fate of the source communities seems to be that of an eternal burden of proof: that the entities were looted, that the looted entities were really theirs; and even in the case of eventual restitution, they have to prove that these entities are relevant to their lives, and also prove that they are able to look after the entities, and so on. The many victims are simply forgotten.

Concluding Remarks

Recent decades have been marked by a few cases of restitution (see Müller 2021), which also means recognising and renouncing the unjust possession of entities belonging to others. Much remains to be done with regard to the amount of cultural property that was forcibly removed in colonial contexts.

Moreover, the act of restitution must be concerted, otherwise, there is a risk of falling back into the trap where the illegal possessor tends to appear as a mere benefactor to those who have been traumatically dispossessed. The Nso and Bele Bele did not wait for their looted entities to be returned before reinventing ways of coping with absence and destabilisation. They filled the void in their own way, by producing or reproducing “duplicates” of the failed entities. Sultan Muhammed-Nabil did not hesitate to sit on his ancestor’s throne, a highly symbolic act of reappropriation or reclamation.²¹ One might imagine that it is not necessary to return the entities. However, physical restitution is not just the act of restoring materiality; it is also about rehumanising and reharmonising relationships that were strained by injustice. What makes colonial collections rather sensitive heritage and not shared heritage is not only the fact that entities have been taken with violence and violation, cunning or threats, death and desecration, but also the impossibility of re-evaluating them because the conditions for these cross-interpretations are arrogantly denied by certain actors or are politically hindered by a mode of operation that is strikingly reminiscent of colonial patterns of domination. In this context, discussions of colonial “collections” must go beyond the simple question of ownership and materiality to address the tragic historical circumstances of their disappearance from their home communities. Discussions of colonial collections must also help to dismantle the current processes of epistemic violence and neocolonial domination at the political, monetary, cultural, scientific, technological, mineralogical, and health levels. Otherwise, restitution risks becoming a simple zombification reset model rather than a tool for liberation.

Notes

- 1 See www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2023/06/rei-do-povo-bamum-senta-em-trono-roubado-pela-alemanha-e-renova-debate-sobre-legado-colonial.shtml.
- 2 “For the first time I had seen the beast unleashed in man and I was still under the impression of all the horror when the first patrols, which had followed the fleeing ones into the forest, arrived, jubilantly loaded with all kinds of booty, and reported how they had come to blows with the enemy in the dense forest.” (Translation by the author)
- 3 “I am pleased to see from your letter that you liked the last collection. I have now received some very beautiful things from the Banzoi campaign. Mainly bronzes (pipes, drinking cups, bells, etc.). Captain Glauning has collected a lot again, but I assume for Berlin. Just a few days ago, another load transport came through Tinto, including the war drum from Banzoi – it was carried by 21 people – I enclose a small photograph of it.” (Translation by the author) Correspondence of Adolf Diehl and Karl Weule on 4 February 1906, Leipzig-Archiv MVL, Diehl 1906/51.
- 4 See under the French colonial period the very detailed and insightful account of Leiris (1934); German Museum Association, 2018, 9–10.
- 5 See Correspondence Schomburgk-Dr. Schachzabel, 24/06-24/07 1924, SMB-ZA I/ MV 756 E 458/24, Bl. 153ff.

- 6 See protestation letter of Lock Priso, quoted by Buchner (1914, 121).
- 7 Buchner (1914, 194). Whereas Buchner underscores the prominent find, others remain silent.
- 8 Conversation with the Chief, His Majesty Mbape Milord in Duala, 22 March 2022.
- 9 Felix von Luschan published on the figure as early as 1903. See Luschan (1903, 430–435).
- 10 Report of Oblt. Hans Houben 1902, BArch R_175_FA_1_Bl_34–36.
- 11 104 objects in total are linked to his name in the Linden Museum, all from 1903.
- 12 In this regard, the silence of Houben over the looted artefacts could be a strategy not to awaken Pavel's interest
- 13 "Als Führer der Expedition und Kommandeur der Truppe hatte er [Pavel] naturgemäß den Löwenanteil an allen Sachen und auch die schönsten Sachen davongetragen [...]", in Rippe (2022, 117).
- 14 Interview with Nji Oumarou Share, Minister of Cultural Affairs, Bamum Palace, 22 June 2023.
- 15 See SMB-ZA I/MV 783, E 115/1906, Bl. 65ff; Geary and Njoya (1985, 166–188).
- 16 See the report of Hans Glauning on the Nso Expedition, 1906, Berlin, Bundesarchiv, R 1001/3353.
- 17 See comments of Governor Theodor Seitz, see Geary and Njoya (1985, 187).
- 18 Rüger (1968, 249); also see Kum'a Ndumbe III (2005 [1970], 44) and Mbanga Eyombwan (2007 [1979], 79).
- 19 Max von Stetten (1860–1925) was the chief of police troops of Cameroon in 1892 and later became commander of the colonial army from 1894 until 1896. He removed about 200 artefacts from Cameroon.
- 20 See for some reactions and press releases on the matter: *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (2022).
- 21 Telephone interview with Nji Oumarou Nshare, Berlin 22 June 2023.

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5 The Ayoréode Collection at the BASA Museum as a Glocal Place

On Movements and Displacements

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Carla Jaimes Betancourt*

Introduction

The Ayoréode are a cross-border indigenous group living in the Chaco Boreal in southeastern Bolivia and northern Paraguay. Their (former) semi-nomadic way of life and history are marked by movement, both voluntary mobility and forced displacement due to the appropriation of their territories by non-indigenous people (*cojñone*). Many of the artefacts the Ayoréode produce(d) are designed to suit being on the move. These include different kinds of bags made from the fibres of a specific bromeliad or *garabatá* plant, whose materiality differ depending on who is using them and for which purpose, and particularly the women's large bags *ubéi* in which they carry all the household goods and which take on a round shape when filled. Other examples are the sandals *paoi* made from tapir skin and *dochiyai* made from wood, worn depending on the dry or wet condition of the ground, and the axe, a multi-functional tool, consisting of its active part with the blade and two wooden sticks that serve as handles. The axe's components are tied together with a *garabatá* cord when used—for instance, to open up hives in tree trunks to extract honeycombs—and disassembled for transport.

The less the Ayoréode moved in the processes of appropriation of their territory and gradual sedentarisation, the more their artefacts became accessible for collecting and were moved away from the Chaco. This is also true for those objects in the Ayoréode collection at the BASA Museum (Bonn Collection of the Americas) of the Department for the Anthropology of the Americas of the University of Bonn, which grew successively with the collections from Heinz Kelm, Bernd Fischermann, Paul Armbruster, Ulf Lind, Walter Hausmann, and the authors of this article until 2018 (see table). Except for those donated by Armbruster and those we purchased in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, capital of the southeastern Department Santa Cruz in Bolivia, the objects in this collection reflect the Ayoréode's former way of life adapted to the two seasons in the Chaco. During the rainy season, they lived in relatively permanent camps and practised agriculture in addition to hunting and gathering forays, while during the dry season, the local groups continuously moved along the web of paths across their once extensive territories.

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Table 5.1 Collections of Ayoréode objects at the BASA Museum

Collection	Objects	From	Collected in	Acquired by the BASA Museum in, via	Connections to	
					Persons / institutions	Other museums
Heinz Kelm	89	Bolivia (Zapocó, Tobité, Cordillera province, among others)	1955–1956	1961, purchase	Joyce Buchegger / New Tribes Mission (NTM), Jürgen Riester, Hermann Trimborn	Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, Weltkulturen Museum (Frankfurt)
Bernd Fischermann	7	Bolivia (Yoquiday, Santa Teresita); Asunción, Paraguay	1969–1971	Before 1976, loan	APCOB, ^a Elmar Klingler, Ulf Lind, Jürgen Riester, Hermann Trimborn	Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, MUSEF ^b (La Paz)
Ulf Lind	117	El Faro Moro, Paraguay	1969–1970	2017, donation	Joyce Buchegger / NTM, María Susana Cipolletti, Bernd Fischermann, Jürgen Riester, Hermann Trimborn	Museum der Kulturen Basel
Paul Armbruster	20	Bolivia	1992–1993	2004, donation	Elmar Klingler, (María Susana Cipolletti)	–
Carla Jaimes Betancourt, Karoline Noack, Naomi Rattunde (study trip)	14	Santa Cruz, Bolivia	2018	2018, purchase	Jürgen Riester, APCOB, CANOB ^c	–
Walter Hausmann	17	Paraguay (Cerro León, among others)	1961/1981, 1965/1966/ ca. 1970	2018, donation	Jakob Unger jun., Peter Klassen	Museo Jakob Unger (Filadelfia), ZFMK ^d (Bonn), various

^a Apoyo Para el Campesino-indígena del Oriente Boliviano (see <https://apcob.org.bo/>, last access: 07/11/2022).

^b Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore (see <http://musef.org.bo/>, last access: 07/11/2022).

^c Central Ayorea Nativa del Oriente Boliviano.

^d Zoologisches Forschungsmuseum Alexander Koenig (see <https://bonn.leibniz-lib.de/en/museum>, last access: 07/11/2022).

We explore in this article this Ayoréode collection at the BASA Museum with its movements and relations in the past, present, and future as a glocal place, adopting Ingold's (2000, 2011) notion of "place" and Roudometof's (2016) understanding of "glocal" as our main theoretical premises inscribed in museum and heritage contexts, as explained below. We follow the "lines of wayfaring" of the artefacts now inhabiting this place. Their "transfers"—another concept, adopted here from Savoy (2016)—to places far from where they had originated and circulated until then, were set in motion by collectors, and occurred along the lines (Ingold 2011) of their movements and engagements. We describe how the artefacts' and collectors' movements intermingle with the lines of individual and institutional actors involved in and beyond the collecting activities; these are to be seen in (historical) contexts shaped by globally occurring and entangled endeavours like colonisation, Christianisation, collectionism, and ethnographic research. Ethnographic research in the collection combines archival–historical research on site, the exploration of the artefact's materiality and a field trip to the territory of the Ayoréode in Santa Cruz de la Sierra. We thus address the more recent threads engaging with the collection through researching, extending, and displaying it, which join the artefacts' ongoing itineraries to new places.¹

On "Place" and the "Glocal"—Theoretical Considerations

As a "place," the collection came into being through and is "[b]ound together by the itineraries of its inhabitants" (Ingold 2000, 219), i.e., of the artefacts composing it. It is like a knot tied from threads which are "lines of wayfaring." These lines, or itineraries, are not contained within the place but move beyond it and become caught up with other lines in other places (Ingold 2011, 149). "And every place, as a gathering of things, is a knot of stories," whereby the things "are identified [...] by the memories they call up" (Ingold 2011, 154). Thus, a collection, as a "gathering of things" par excellence, is the knot of the stories about the itineraries of all the things gathered in the *collection place*. It affords experiences to those who engage in or with it and gathers its particular character and significance from the relational context of experiences and engagements along those itineraries (Ingold 2000, 192).

Being delineated by movement (Ingold 2011, 149), places have no locations but histories, and they "exist not in space but as nodes in a matrix of movement" (Ingold 2000, 219). Ingold (2000, 229) calls this matrix a "region," whereby his notion of "region" is a means to transcend the dichotomous thinking of local particularities and global universals. Although Ingold stresses that "region" does not denote a generalising intermediate level, it evokes the "glocal," described as the co-presence "of both universalising and particularising tendencies" by Robertson (1997), who helped introduce the concept into the social sciences and humanities. Despite still being theoretically underdeveloped, the "glocal" "offers an additional layer [...] to capture the complexity and multifaceted nature of social processes" (Roudometof

2016, 10). In his effort to establish the “glocal” as an autonomous analytical category, Roudometof (2016, 65–66) suggests that glocalisation is the process of “refraction” of global waves through the local. Such processes of interaction of the global and the local produce glocalities, which are glocally experienced conditions (see also Noack 2023).

The “region” within which the Ayoréode collection is a node is no geographic entity but stretches over several of them, including the Bolivian and Paraguayan Chaco, Bonn, and other cities in Germany and Switzerland. “Place” and “region” alike involve both global–local and local–local relations and are, thus, glocal *and* translocal (see Roudometof and Carpentier (2022) for a discussion of both concepts’ affinity). Particularly in museum and heritage contexts dealing with displacements of things, the lens of translocality can help examine not only the movements and power relations they reflect, but also the “gaps and silences that occur as a result of these movements” as Puzon (2018, 30) suggests, relying on Savoy’s (2016, 3) plea to consider the “actual phenomenon of the transfer itself.”

Whereas a place in the Ingoldian sense is, per definition, what one could (but Ingold wouldn’t) call “glocal,” since “through the movements that give rise to it, [the place] enfolds its relations to all others” (Ingold 2000, 229), we want to make the glocal explicit as a quality of the Ayoréode collection as a place. Though primarily located in Bonn, this *collection place* is a glocal place. It is beyond the local, for it only exists due to place-to-place movements embedded in global relations. These relations and movements within the “region,” through which the *collection place* has become meaningful, are the stories we seek to unknit by narrating them, including the gaps and silences.

Refractions—On Ayoréode History

Until the middle of the 20th century, the “Ayoréode,” “human beings” in their language, self-identified through belonging to extended family units forming local groups organised into fluid band confederations (Bessire 2011, 262). Each local group had a name referencing a specific place—based on its particular characteristics like the presence of water sources, certain animals or plants, or an event that happened there—and controlled a specific territory or *uniri* (Kelm 1960, 347; Fischermann 1988, 43–48; Pia 2014, 28–30; Dutujede Etacori’s narration on giving place names in Quiroga and Fischermann 1988, 164–175). However, neither place names nor groups, group membership nor territories were fixed but changed over time (Bessire 2014, 69). Moreover, there were joint-use areas accessible to all “human beings,” among which the large saline lakes at the heart of the Ayoréode’s ancestral territory near the present-day Bolivian–Paraguayan border figure most prominently, a place they call *Echoi* (Fischermann 1988, 27–29; Bessire 2011, 262).

The Ayoréode were commonly referred to as “*bárbaros*” by *cojñone* in Bolivia and “*moros*” in Paraguay. The first *cojñone* to learn that these

peoples call themselves “Ayoré” were North American missionaries from the evangelical New Tribes Mission (NTM, today Ethnos360), founded in 1942, which initiated its activities in Bolivia in the same year and was the first mission that tried to contact the Ayoréode. As reported by the missionary Jean Dye Johnson, who was widowed in 1943 when Ayoréode killed her husband and his four companions during their attempt to make contact, she was taught this name by Guto’date, an Ayoré woman captured by a rancher in 1929, who in 1945 started to teach Johnson her language (see Combès 2009, 122–123; Bessire 2014, 98–99). Ethnologists learned of the name “Ayoré” through two short reports about an until then “unknown” group in the *Wiener Völkerkundliche Mitteilungen* (Haekel 1955; Zerries 1955). Shortly thereafter, in 1955 and 1956, Heinz Kelm (1925–1983), who had obtained his doctorate in Ethnology in Bonn, was the first ethnologist to visit Ayoréode and publish about them (Kelm 1960, 1963a, 1963b, 1964, 1971). Through linguistic comparisons, Kelm identified the “Ayoré” in Bolivia and the “Moro” in Paraguay as a single ethnic group descended from the historical “Zamucos” who had been gathered rather unsuccessfully in *reducciones* (formalised settlements with church, jail, and municipality) by Jesuit missionaries in the 18th century (see Combès 2009; Bessire 2014, 62–64). On his field trips to Bolivia, Kelm collected dozens of artefacts among the Ayoréode, many of which he sold to the teaching and study collection of the then *Seminar für Völkerkunde* of the University of Bonn, today’s BASA Museum. Those artefacts are the oldest ones within the *collection place* and among the earliest Ayoréode objects in a museum collection at all.²

While there remain some Ayoréode groups living in voluntary isolation at “the literal margins of industrial agriculture” (Bessire 2012, 471), since the late 19th century, the Ayoréode have come under increasing pressure due to mass colonisation of the Chaco through state-encouraged European and Mennonite immigration. Bolivia and Paraguay advanced militarisation and transport infrastructure construction, thereby cutting the Ayoréode’s territory into pieces. Thus, moving along their grown paths became dangerous, if not impossible. The colonisation led to a northward movement of several local groups, severe conflicts between them, and increased sporadic encounters between Ayoréode and *cojñone*. The territorial dispute between Bolivia and Paraguay culminated in the Chaco War (1932–1935), after which international oil companies began exploiting the area, followed by settlers and missionaries. On the battlefields, previously unseen quantities of iron had been left behind; this increased the Ayoréode’s mobility to obtain these resources. Iron was a material they valued highly, used in the fabrication of their tools like the axes, and incorporated into mythical kinship relations and stories (Fischermann 1988, 67 and 136–139).

The missionaries’ efforts to sedentarise and Christianise the Ayoréode made them cease to move across their territories, and their artefacts stayed with them. While the Ayoréode’s semi-nomadic way of life began to vanish, ethnologists interested in their “traditional culture” started to arrive in mission

villages, which were the only places where fieldwork among Ayoréode was possible, albeit only with those who had already left their *uniri* (see Glauser 2008, 46–58). All early ethnologists investigating Ayoréode also collected objects, thus generating new movements of their artefacts into museum collections.

A Journey Begins—Collections Affordances

Our journey to the Ayoréode *collection place* began with the transfer of around 120 Ayoréode artefacts from Neuwied to Bonn in 2017. They were collected by Ulf Lind (born 1941) in 1969/70 during his ethnographic fieldwork among the Ayoréode living in El Faro Moro, an NTM mission in Paraguay, for his doctoral thesis on Ayoréode medicine defended at the University of Bonn (Lind 1974). After almost half a century, Lind wanted the collection to move on and contacted us, mediated by María Susana Cipolletti. While offering his collection to the BASA Museum, associated with the wish for an exhibition about “the Ayoréode culture,” Lind was also interested in returning the artefacts to the Ayoréode in Paraguay with our help. After having discussed this proposal, Lind decided to donate his collection to the BASA Museum and we agreed that our institution would support possible future efforts to make it accessible to the Ayoréode in Paraguay.

Lind’s collection joining the Ayoréode collection at the BASA Museum afforded us—not just as a possibility of action (see Basu and De Jong 2016, 10–11) but as a request—the chance to revisit and engage with this *collection place* as a whole, following its “inhabitants” (Ingold), who had neither moved nor been looked at for a long time, and follow their paths. The outcome of this engagement was the exhibition “*eramone* | *Weltsichten* [worldviews],” elaborated with six students under our direction and displayed from July to December of 2018, with its extensive catalogue (Rattunde et al. 2019).

The Ayoréode have innumerable mythic narratives about the origins of (almost) all phenomena and things known to them. According to these *cuchade quicujadie* (traces or stories of origin), everything transformed in the era of the *jnani’bajade* (ancestors in the pretime when all beings were persons) into what it is in the contemporary age of the *Ayorei disi ejode* (Ayoréode of the new generation). Thus, an artefact is not only something created by a human individual but originated through a *jnani’bajai*’s transformation, or was owned and given by a *jnani’bajai* to the Ayoréode. With their transformations, generally caused by conflict situations, the *jnani’bajade* ceased to be part of that social community without human–nonhuman differentiation. Still, they maintain their agency through the precepts and prohibitions on human behaviour and therapeutic chants they left behind. The *jnani’bajade*’s agency is present in the fabrication of actual artefacts and, when being used, in the artefacts themselves (Bórmida 2006 [1], 18 and 31–32; Pia 2014, 48–49).

These complex provenances of (material) things within the Ayoréode ontology were an important conceptual pillar of the exhibition, in which we reproduced stories about the origins of many artefacts based on the research of Fischermann (1988) and Bórmida (2006). However, the exhibition took a twofold ethnographic approach to the worldviews of the Ayoréode on the one hand and, on the other, of the ethnographer-collectors, their work being the origin of our (world)view of the Ayoréode.

From Erami to Cojñone-Gari

The artefacts gathered by Lind, Kelm, and Fischermann constitute the most relevant part of the Ayoréode collection at the BASA Museum. The lines of movement of these three ethnographer-collectors are not only entangled in the *collection place* today, but also have a common place of departure since the three studied Ethnology in Bonn with Hermann Trimborn (1901–1986),³ Fischermann and Lind almost simultaneously. Like all ethnologists who worked about the Ayoréode until the 1970s, among them Lucien Sebag (1933–1965) from France and Marcelo Bórmida (1925–1973) from Argentina, they were interested in the Ayoréode's life in *erami* (sg.) or *eramone* (pl.), i.e., the forest-world which the Ayoréode associate with precontact life (Bessire 2014, 137; see Glauser 2008, 59–71). However, they had to search for that “Ayoreo tradition” in the stations of the six mission societies present in the territory until then (Bessire 2014, 32–35). The missionaries were indispensable for them as gatekeepers, providers of infrastructure for the fieldwork and, above all, as translators whose views inevitably fed into the recording and interpretation of ethnographic data.

Lind is most explicit about the “substantial contribution” of Joyce Violet Buchegger (1931–2016), the wife of El Faro Moro's head, Heinrich Buchegger, to his ethnography. She had worked for NTM since the mid-1950s and did not only translate for Lind but gave him a general introduction to Ayoréode culture and added “time-saving explanations” to the conversations with Ayoréode informants, among whom the powerful leader Vejái Picanerái was the most important (Lind 1974, 3 and 22). As Lind notes, Buchegger's knowledge was also crucial to Kelm and Sebag, for whom she translated in Tobité. While Kelm does not mention her at all, Sebag (1964, 126; 1965: 6) praises her as a “first class interpreter” without whom his research would not have been possible.

Tobité, the first mission station where Ayoréode settled permanently, was founded by NTM in the surroundings of Roboré (Department of Santa Cruz), at that time a centre for “Indian hunters,” where they started, following the suggestion of an army officer, searching for “the most difficult to contact” indigenous group. Without a particular interest in the Ayoréode as human beings but granted with a state mandate to “civilize the Barbarian Indians” by the Bolivian director of colonisation in 1946 (Bessire 2014, 94–95), NTM initiated a profound transformation process of how the Ayoréode live in the world and make sense of it and their humanity.

For the Ayoréode, contact with *cojñone* and missionaries created a New World, *Cojñone-Gari*, associated with capitalist modernity, controlled by the Christian God *Dupade*, and distinct from the forest-world *Erami* in its “metaphysical ecology” (Bessire 2014, 137). They developed a unique and, one might say, glocal version of Christianity, where elements of Christian belief are not just incorporated but refracted through the lens of Ayoreo ontology, producing new Ayoreo–Christian ontologies. In this way, following Bessire (2014, 137–145), they made conversion itself intelligible as a form of touching, *isa*, which occurs when hunting an animal, capturing an enemy, or being contacted by missionaries or touched by God. *Isa* is conceptualised as a violent act through which the touchers gain possession of those touched, causing a substantial and bodily transformation of the subordinated, which resonates with the *jnani’bajade*’s transformations in mythical times. When touching an Ayoréode, God removed their soul matter *ayipie*, the corporeal seat of memory and willpower, and replaced it with His spirit. He caused their transformation—deemed essential for survival in *Cojñone-Gari*—into a different kind of human being, sometimes referred to as *Ayore-Cojñoque*, implying “both white Ayoréode and human–nonhuman” (Bessire 2014, 145).

When thinking of the artefacts as transformed *jnani’bajade* against this background, we might wonder what kind of new transformations they experienced when the Ayoréode moved with them from *Erami*, where the objects in the Kelm, Lind, Fischermann, and Hausmann collections originated, to *Cojñone-Gari* and then, when the collectors touched and transferred them far away. What happened to their agencies? What memories have been erased?

The image of the dis- and replacement of a person’s memory, combined with the Ayoreo–Christian belief that remembering the past was potentially dangerous in *Cojñone-Gari* since it could cause illness, is crucial to understanding why many Ayoréode do or claim not to remember much of what happened in *Erami*, and, particularly, at *Echoi*. Whereas Kelm (1963b, 77–78), Lind (1974, 105), and Fischermann (1988, 58–59) described the saline lakes primarily as a site of resource exploitation and warfare between local groups, Bessire (2014, 49–83) succeeded in carefully tracing a counter-history of that place. Formerly known as *Erami Gatocoro* (“centre of the World”) and considered the place of origin of Ayoréode humanity, *Echoi* was a shared place where Ayoréode from their different *uniri* socialised, exchanged, gathered salt, and had a designated spot for the year’s most important celebration of *asojnëá*, described in great detail by Kelm (1971). The peace at *Echoi* broke in the 1930s due to increasing pressure from the *cojñone* and resulting violence among the local groups. *Echoi* changed forever, becoming a “lost place” to which it became impossible to return.

The figure of the erased memory by God’s touch also points to the significant dilemmas faced by the ethnographers in the missions and, conversely, by recently converted Ayoréode with the ethnographers’ interest in past practices. Lind, for example, commented that his ethnographic work was

hampered because several “original cultural activities” were forbidden and carried out clandestinely, if at all (Lind 1974, 24–25; 1977, 133). However, he was unaware of the danger, possibly perceived by the Ayoréode, to which they would expose themselves when remembering and speaking about such activities. The presence of ethnologists in the Ayoréode’s life led to the creation of a proper category, *abujádie*, for those “only interested in recording or collecting *cucha bajade*,” the original things. Some evangelical Ayoréode, particularly in NTM missions in Paraguay, fear the *abujádie* as “helpers of the Devil” for wanting “people to tell those old bad things,” as one of Bessire’s informants explained, adding that “[i]t seems like they must sell them later” (Bessire 2014, 22–24). While occasionally mentioning the transformation process and ruptures they witnessed, often in terms of them complicating their research (Kelm 1971, 115; Lind 1974, 41–42), these *abujádie* created and fetishised a static version of “Ayoréode tradition,” which materialised in the collections they built and later indeed, in some cases, sold. Thus, they were unable to see that “traditional Ayoreo ontology” could only be an “ontology of transformation” (Bessire 2014, 39).

Traces, Gaps, and Silences in Collection Stories

Memories got lost not only in the transformation of Ayoréode, becoming different humans in *Cojñone-Gari*, but also in the transfers of collected artefacts, thereby becoming ethnographic objects. The ethnographer-collectors hardly wrote about their collecting, leaving only single traces which may be related to their blindness to the relevance of their activities. Fischermann (1988, 14) mentioned at least briefly that he “succeeded in creating a complete collection of Ayoréode material culture,” then transferred to the *Museum für Völkerkunde* in Berlin.

For the Ayoréode artefacts collected by Kelm, the only sources of information about their provenance we know of are the index cards and acquisition documentation archived at the BASA Museum. Kelm sold these 89 objects to the university collection, based on an offer for “some complete collections” from the Bolivian lowlands in October 1959. A written offer itself is not preserved, but a list exists of the overall 334 objects with their inventory numbers and prices attached to the invoices dating from October 1961 for a total of DM 2513.15, thereof DM 920.55 for the Ayoréode objects. A large part of these acquisitions—DM 1910 which Kelm received as an advance payment in 1959—were paid from special funds of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and the German Research Foundation (DFG). Most likely Trimborn asked Kelm, as well as others, to collect objects during his research trip to expand the Seminar’s collection, whose total holdings amounted to about 2000 objects in 1961. The apparent strategy for building the collection, which in that early phase included applying for the special funds mentioned, has always been dependent on coincidences and redirected according to changing circumstances (Noack 2017; Rattunde 2020a). While

most index cards only mention the Department Santa Cruz as the objects' geographical origin, there are a few indicating more specific places where Kelm supposedly collected: seven objects in "Rio Zapocóz" (Zapocó was founded in 1950 by the South American Indian Mission, SAIM, today's South America Mission), one each in Bella Vista and the NTM station Tobité, and two in the Cordillera province, which shares a long border with Paraguay and encompasses the area of *Echoi*. In a somewhat contradictory way, an overview index card for the Ayoréode mentions, besides Zapocó, different places of origin: the catholic mission Fatima close to San José, Lourdes on the railroad between Santa Cruz and Corumbá (constructed between 1945 and 1955 cutting the paths to *Echoi*) and, remarkably, the area of the salt lakes. Despite their inaccuracies and lacking information on what basis the index cards were, in 1979, created, they provide valuable hints at stations of Kelm's research trips.

In Kelm's publications, we find only very few isolated dates about his fieldwork in 1955, 1956, and in the spring of 1962 or 1963 (Kelm 1960, 336; 1963b, 70). That spring, in San José de Chiquitos, he met Bill [William] Pencille (Kelm 1963a, 311), who led SAIM's work among Ayoréode in the 1950s and 1960s and, in 1960, succeeded in establishing contact with the local group led by Uejái, Lind's primary informant, and converting him (see Bessire 2011, 286; 2014, 100–112). In his article on the Zamuco language, Kelm (1964, 458) remarks in a footnote that he is "especially indebted to Howard and Maxine Morarie [in] Tobité" for references on the Ayoréode language.⁴ These are, until then, the only mentions of individual persons and one location which confirm his visit to Tobité, though not Joyce Buchegger's translating for him, and suggest a connection between the objects from Zapocó and Pencille. Only in his latest publication about the Ayoréode and their fiesta of *asojná* does Kelm name some of his Ayoréode informants. He mentions a hunting trip (probably near Zapocó) in May 1956 with Cojmai, who identified a bird they had startled as *asojná* (Kelm 1971, 98, note 2). Comai Chiqueno, who as an orphan child had been "given" to Pencille and worked with him until the mid-1960s, had a key position similar to that of Guto'date in enabling first contacts (Bessire 2014, 254, note 38). During his first visit to Tobité, Kelm met Suarejnacaride and Soriade, who had participated in killing the five NTM missionaries in 1943 (Kelm 1971, 136, note 73). His main informant regarding the fiesta of *asojná*—which Kelm himself could not witness even though he was, in 1955, in Tobité in July and the beginning of August when the celebration took place—was Samane (Kelm 1971, 115), to whom he refers several times and who would later become one of Bórmida's and Fischermann's primary informants. In 1956, a stomach upset that ailed Kelm was cured by Aside, mentioned decades later as a capable healer by one of Pia's (2014) informants. As further informants he named Ayoí, Jurūgai, and Dajeside (Kelm 1971, 130–133) and, most noteworthy, Bariguejnai, who one day offered to sell him his gourd rattle, explaining that "he could no longer accompany his singing with it since

Carayoi had dropped the loaned rattle on the ground” and that, if he used the thus desecrated rattle anyway, *asojná* would punish him and his wife “with a fatal disease” (Kelm 1971, 126). We do not know if that particular gourd rattle is one of the two Kelm sold to the BASA Museum. Overall, gaps remain concerning Kelm’s journey periods and routes, his contacts, encounters with Ayoréode in general, and the more specific circumstances of the objects’ provenance, since no other documentation known to us exists about when, where, and how he collected.

Whether they remember or not, some of the artefacts Kelm collected were indeed and others may have once been in the now “lost place” *Echoi*. This is also true of the 109 Ayoréode objects Kelm sold in 1969 to the *Museum für Völkerkunde* Berlin, where he worked after his time in Bonn and before becoming director of the *Museum für Völkerkunde* in Frankfurt (1972–1983), which holds at least two Ayoréode objects collected by him. Further research in the corresponding archives in Berlin and Frankfurt may help close some of the gaps concerning Kelm’s and also Fischermann’s collecting practices.

Fischermann’s Ayoréode collection at the BASA Museum comprises only seven objects on permanent loan, since sometime before 1976⁵, collected during a research journey from 1969 to 1971, which was the beginning of his long-term engagement with the Ayoréode. While their number may seem insignificant, these objects moved along the same line with Fischermann (born in 1940), today recognised as a leading Ayoréode specialist, to Europe as those comprising what is probably the world’s most extensive Ayoréode collection of 403 objects which he sold to the *Museum für Völkerkunde* Berlin in 1973. That one is the “complete collection” Fischermann (1988, 14) mentioned in the preface of his voluminous doctoral thesis on the Ayoréode worldview.

According to the index cards in Bonn, Fischermann collected most of the objects in Yoquiday (Poza Verde), a SAIM mission founded in 1963 and one of the two main sites of his fieldwork. One object is from the Franciscan mission Santa Teresita, the second main site, where he first came into contact with Ayoréode and started his research, following the offer of that mission’s founder and head, the Austrian Pater Elmar Klingler (1915–1995), who had lived in Bolivia among Ayoréode since 1954. Another object is from Asunción, Paraguay. We can only suggest that Santa Teresita and Yoquiday, as the much larger mission village, were the principal collecting places of the objects in the Berlin collection he probably acquired, at least in large part, by purchase. As Fischermann (1988, 22) noted, Ayoréode from Yoquiday told him years later that the money from selling material artefacts and his payments to informants—in his view only “insignificant amounts of money”—provided a modest income for them, thanks to which they did not have to pursue other work.⁶

The limited information Fischermann gave about his collecting contrasts sharply with his extensive work on the Ayoréode and the vast quantity of artefacts he collected over decades. Today, about 250 artefacts remain

in Bolivia's most important ethnographic museum, the *Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore* (MUSEF) in La Paz. Between 2007 and 2010, their Ayoréode collection grew to nearly 450 objects with the acquisitions purchased from and donated by Fischermann. The MUSEF is a node in the broader "region" of the *collection place* in that it acquired its older Ayoréode collections from the mid-1970s with the help of Jürgen Riester (1941–2019), who was our gatekeeper to the Ayoréode in Santa Cruz.

Like Fischermann, Riester studied with Trimborn (and Kelm) and had made acquaintance with Klingler during his first journey (already in 1963) to the Chaco (Riester in APCOB 2012, 15–16). Both co-organised the Ayoréode's first political reunion in 1978 (Etacori and Itimbae 1978), and co-founded, in 1980, the NGO *Apoyo Para el Campesino Indígena del Oriente Boliviano* (APCOB) based in Santa Cruz and directed by Riester until his death in 2019. Riester also collected and sold, between 1970 and 1981, about 250 Ayoréode objects to the *Museum der Kulturen Basel* in Switzerland, which moreover holds about 60 Ayoréode objects from El Faro Moro acquired in 1974 from Verena Regehr.⁷ She and her husband, Walter Regehr (1935–1992), had lived in the Mennonite colonies since the 1960s, interrupted by their studies of Ethnology in Basel (1973–1977); after this they returned to Paraguay with their daughters Vera and Ursula, who also became anthropologists. Walter and Verena engaged in research (see Regehr 1979) and advocated for the Ayoréode, and Verena and Vera have continued this work until today with a particular commitment to the protection of indigenous territories.⁸ Ursula Regehr also researched among indigenous groups in the Paraguayan Chaco and has, since 2019, been the curator for the Africa collection at the *Museum der Kulturen Basel*.

The traces of these collection stories lead back to Lind, who, similar to Fischermann, mentioned the sale of ethnographic objects as a new income source for the Ayoréode in El Faro Moro (Lind 1974, 60). We know from conversations with Lind that he acquired objects by purchase or in exchange for other goods, yet, there are no records and only faint memories of specific transactions. Some artefacts, however, like most of the cone-shaped ceramic pots which because of the availability of alternatives the Ayoréode no longer produced in the missions, were fabricated for the collection on his request.

In contrast to the gaps and silences in Lind's written and spoken words, the context of the objects' provenance is documented in almost 350 photographs, partially taken with a single-lens reflex camera Lind had bought from Riester in Bonn. An analysis of these images by master's student Annkatrin Benz is part of the exhibition catalogue (Rattunde et al. 2019). Beyond contextualising the collection, the photographs document the local conditions of El Faro Moro, at Lind's time a fledgling NTM mission and today another "lost place." El Faro Moro was established in 1968 by moving southward from the station at Cerro León, founded only in 1966 about 100 km south of *Echoi*, and again relocated in 1979 to Campo Loro, in immediate proximity to the Mennonite colonies. Whereas Lind (1974, 22 and

41) only referred to the missionaries' reasons for the 1968 translocation, according to Fischermann (1988, 33), the Ayoréode themselves enforced both translocations in order to reside closer to possible workplaces to earn a living. El Faro Moro's story—in part remembered through the photos and objects translocated by Lind—powerfully reveals that, even after becoming sedentary, the Ayoréode did not entirely cease to move in search of resources.

Shortly before inaugurating the exposition "*eramone | Weltsichten*," the BASA Museum received further seventeen Ayoréode objects within the collection Walter Hausmann donated by his family.⁹ Unlike the collectors whose movements we have traced so far, Hausmann (1921–2003) was not an ethnologist but a toolmaker, collotype retoucher, and art painter who lived in Berlin. He never travelled to the Chaco, but collected through contacts in the Mennonite colonies with whom he maintained correspondence from the mid-1950s until the 1980s. In addition to the objects, the donation includes letters Hausmann received, albums of photos sent to him from Paraguay, and several issues of the *Mennoblatt*, the magazine of the Mennonites in Paraguay, including some with short articles by Hausmann himself. Finally, the collection also comprises index cards created by Hausmann, many with object drawings. Besides the letters, some of which narrate fragments of individual objects' stories, the index cards inform about the dates and often the places and persons who collected, allowing these objects' provenances to be traced more accurately than those collected by Kelm and Fischermann.

Hausmann's exchange partners were namely Jakob Unger (1894–1959), a hunter, self-taught taxidermist, and renowned collector of animals, especially birds, from the Chaco; his sons Heinrich and Jakob Unger, who partly continued their father's work; and Peter Klassen (1926–2018), a specialist on the history of the Mennonites in Paraguay and editor of the *Mennoblatt* for over 30 years, beginning in 1956. Hausmann paid for the objects they sent him by post, though according to the index cards, he received several as presents. The Ayoréode objects were collected by Jakob Unger junior in 1961 and 1981 (nine and four objects, respectively, two from 1961 given to Hausmann as presents) and in 1965, 1966, and around 1970 by Klassen, who acquired the three later ones at Cerro León and bestowed all four as presents. Moreover, Hausmann mediated contact between the Ungers and museums that acquired zoological collections from them—among them the *Museum Koenig* in Bonn—and helped with related financial and administrative affairs. There are Unger collections in the *Museo Jakob Unger* in Filadelfia which, besides flora and fauna of the Chaco, also displays ethnographic artefacts (see Klassen 1987; Rohkohl 1987), as well as several museums across the global north, including the BASA Museum with some specimens within the Hausmann collection.

Like Hausmann, Paul Armbruster also collected through an intermediary, but by coincidence rather than intentionally. Armbruster had worked among the Ayoréode at Klingler's mission Santa Teresita as a development aid worker in the early 1970s. When they met again in 1992/1993, Klingler gave

Armbruster 20 Ayoréode artefacts fabricated that same year. This is the only existing information on the provenance of these objects Armbruster donated to the BASA Museum in 2004, recorded in the short protocol of an interview with him in October 2004 conducted by two of Cipolletti's students who also created the (handwritten) index cards.

The traces of the Ayoréode collection's stories occasionally move far away from Bonn but are part of the glocal and translocal *collection place*. They also lead to the gaps of varying extent, resulting from torn or lost threads in the collection knot, and draw our attention to the silences, particularly from Ayoréode themselves, that occurred along the objects' transfers.

Beyond Eramone—Living in Cojñone-Gari

The artefacts in the Armbruster collection, and especially the textiles that primarily compose it, are remarkable in two ways: First, they substantialise the fact that the agencies of at least some *jnani'bajade* are still alive in *Cojñone-Gari* as well as the knowledge and skills they once gave to the Ayoréode. The first *jnani'bajai* who fabricated cords and textiles was *Bujóte*. She worked tirelessly, generously gave textiles to the other Ayoréode, and transformed into a black bird that builds its nest from *garabatá* fibres. Thanks to *Bujóte*, whose activities were the beginning of proficiency itself, the Ayoréode know how to produce *garabatá* textiles (see Fischermann 1988, 159–160, 467–468; Bórmida 2006 [2]: 118–120). The textiles in the Armbruster collection are mainly made from *garabatá* with the fabrication techniques the Ayoréode learned from *Bujóte*, resulting in the same or similar designs and structures as in *Erami*. Secondly, these small- and medium-sized bags from the 1990s show that the Ayoréode incorporated new materials that became accessible to them only in *Cojñone-Gari*. In some bags, the *garabatá* fibres are combined with synthetic and cotton yarn dyed with artificial colours, and one bag even has a zipper.

An obvious *Cojñone-Gari* provenance can also be perceived in the materiality of the 14 artefacts we purchased in 2018 from Ayoréode living in Santa Cruz to complement the collection with contemporary objects, given the then-upcoming exhibition. The most eye-catching one is a bag for carrying children (*júbebi*) manufactured entirely from synthetic threads in seven bright colours, which we bought from its creator, Beatriz Nurumina. Ayoréode women produce and use *júbebi* to carry their children today as they did in *Erami*. However, today in Santa Cruz, they largely employ synthetic threads, which are much cheaper than *garabatá*, which, as they told us, they often import from Paraguay since its availability in Bolivia has sharply declined due to deforestation for soybean plantations and cattle grazing. Another example is a pair of sandals with lacings of *garabatá* in typical Ayoréode fashion but with soles cut from car tire rubber.

The opportunity to acquire this contemporary collection arose during a visit to the seat of CANOB (*Central Ayorea Nativa del Oriente Boliviano*),

the Ayoréode's political organisation in Bolivia, during a study trip with students from our department. Our visit to CANOB, which included a conversation with some of its representatives, was mediated and accompanied by Riester, then still the director of APCOB.¹⁰ We conversed with Riester about ACPOB's engagement with and for indigenous groups in eastern Bolivia, including recent projects realised in Santa Cruz, where today about one-third of the Bolivian Ayoréode, who are among the most marginalised indigenous groups in the region, permanently lives under often deplorable living conditions (see APCOB 2012, 2014, 2016).

For some Ayoréode, especially women, the production and sale of handicrafts like those they offered us at CANOB constitute a relevant source of income today. They mostly fabricate *garabatá* bags, particularly the rectangular *utebé* formerly mainly used by men, with the same design patterns and techniques as in *eramone*, including dyeing the fibres with natural pigments in red or black. Tellingly, Lind (1974, 60) had already observed that bags were the most popular artefacts Ayoréode sold to *cojñone*, particularly among the Mennonites. The bags emblematically embody not only the Ayoréode's being on the move in *eramone*, but also their transition to *Cojñone-Gari*, since both maintained and altered elements characterise their present-day materiality. They are heritage from *erami*, recognised as valuable also by *cojñone*, which Ayoréode could transform into a source of income in *Cojñone-Gari* for this very reason. This manifests in several projects with Ayoréode women aimed at keeping these skills, the resource *garabatá*, and this part of Ayoréode heritage alive, as well as in an exhibition organised by Verena and Ursula Regehr in which Ayoréode textiles, here considered as art, figured prominently (Regehr and Regehr 2011). Against this backdrop, it is astonishing that the Ayoréode's techniques of textile production, which are unique worldwide, have not until recently been studied in detail. Based on the bags at the BASA Museum, master's student Katharina Pawlak practically reproduced these techniques once given by *Bujóte* and described them in detail (Pawlak 2022). She also accompanied the Ayoréode objects on their most recent movements to Zurich and into the World Wide Web.

New Paths and Territories

From our engagement with the Ayoréode collection in the context of the "*eramone* | *Weltsichten*" exhibition, new paths emanated for most of the "inhabitants" of the *collection place*, along which they experienced new relational contextualisation; thus, new lines now join the "knot of stories." In 2020, most of the Ayoréode objects left Bonn and moved to the *Völkerkundemuseum* of the University of Zurich for display in the exhibition "Without honey you have nothing to eat. On the bee knowledge of Ayoréode, Gran Chaco, South America" from November 2020 to January 2022. Conceived corresponding to the Zurich museum's focus on human skills and practical knowledge, the exhibition addressed the Ayoréode's

manifold knowledge about the various bee species in the Chaco, skills of finding bees by following their movements, and practical knowledge of consuming honey and pollen for nutritional and medicinal purposes and of using wax with special qualities from distinct species in the fabrication and care of artefacts like textiles (protection through impregnation), sandals (slip protection), tools, and feather ornaments (adhesive). The exhibition builds on previous projects about bee knowledge in Bolivia carried out by guest curator Henriette Stierlin and, furthermore, narrates the story of one of her main collaborators, Comai Chiqueno (1940–2014), with whom Kelm had gone on a hunting trip in 1956. Sixty years later, Stierlin had a detailed conversation with Comai Chiqueno about his life, which she will publish to fulfil his wish for a book about Ayoréode history from an Ayoréode perspective.

Like the salt from *Echoi*, sweet food like honey had motivated recurrent movements of Ayoréode within their *uniri*. Already Kelm and Lind learned about the extraordinary importance of honey for their diet, the lack of which was tantamount to starving (Lind 1974, 104). Kelm (1963b, 76–78) mentioned that forays and extended expeditions were often exclusively aimed at gathering honey and assumed “the abundant supply of salt and sugar” to have been crucial for the missionaries’ success. As a consequence, the Ayoréode’s fondness for sweets translated into extremely high sugar consumption causing dental damage even in children, as Fischermann (1988, 41) noted. Moreover, he highlighted the correspondence between the exceptional status of honey and salt in the diet and the mythical stories. Several *cuchade quicujadie* describe their common origin from bodily excretions like nasal mucus or decomposing body parts, i.e., from “disgusting substances” related to the human body, and particularly that of the *jnani’bajai* Samá (Fischermann 1988, 152–155 and 445–450). One version of that story, in which after Samá’s death her bones transformed into the salt from *Echoi* and her lice into bees, was also reported by Buchegger to Lind (1974, 109).

The Zurich exhibition joined the loaned objects on their way back to the BASA Museum, where it was transformed according to the local conditions and on display from May 2022 to March 2023. Furthermore, the exhibition, which can be visited in a virtual 360° tour,¹¹ as well as the objects integrating the Kelm and Lind collections, went online and are now moving within a new, digital territory. Beyond the BASA Museum’s database,¹² the objects are accessible through the online portal “Collections from Colonial Contexts” at the German Digital Library (*Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek*, DDB),¹³ launched in November 2021. The portal is the outcome of the pilot phase of the “3-road strategy on the documentation and digital publication of collections from colonial contexts held in Germany,” which was agreed upon by the German federal government, federal states, and municipal umbrella organisations in 2020. These governmental agencies’ endeavours to deal transparently with such collections became institutionalised by creating the

German Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts¹⁴ (see Müller and Noack (2021) for a contextualisation of the Contact Point's genesis). The choice for the Kelm and Lind collections to be integrated into the portal may not seem the most obvious one at first sight, especially considering the focus of the general debate about collections from colonial contexts, provenance research, and restitution in Germany (and beyond) being collections from the former German colonies and the Benin Bronzes. However, there were good reasons for this choice.

First, the Ayoréode objects undoubtedly pertain to what the German Museums Association (2021, 36–38) defined in its guidelines for the *Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts* as collections acquired “under the informal influence of colonial powers” or existing “informal colonial structures.” Second, Kelm and Lind (Fischermann and Hausmann, too) created the collections at a time of ongoing colonisation and missionisation of Ayoréode and their territories, whose permanent contact with the respective national societies began late considering the long history of colonisation of the Americas. The Ayoréode's mobility and strategies of hiding from and refusing relations with potentially dangerous invaders may have contributed to their long-lasting, though not absolute “isolation,” at the latest since Jesuit mission times (Bessire 2012). Third, the collections originated from a context of internal colonisation involving different kinds of glocal players. When informing Lind about his collection's integration into the portal, he replied that it “seems clear” that the areas where the indigenous people of the Chaco lived “can also be considered colonies of the states of Paraguay and Bolivia” (e-mail from 15 December 2021). Fourth, although Kelm and Lind collected motivated by scientific interest during ethnographic fieldwork, there is a lot of opacity rather than transparency regarding their collecting practices, let alone forms of payments or prices. Indisputably, power structures rooted in colonialism were at play in the triangle of relations between ethnographer–collectors, mediating missionaries, and the Ayoréode creators of the objects.

Concluding Remarks

Since the beginning of our engagement with the Ayoréode collection at the BASA Museum, by chance of a donation and transfer, we have tried to unknot the stories of movements and entangled global relations through which this “gathering of things” became a glocal place that we are still learning to comprehend. While exploring the things gathered in this *collection place* together with the contributing students, which beyond the objects includes photographs, archival material, and publications evoking memories but also gaps and silences, new lines, and relations emerged and joined the “knot of stories.” Some of the lines we set in motion from Bonn (purchase of artefacts on the study trip, “*eramone | Weltsichten*,” portal of Collections of Colonial Context), while others came to us (Hausmann collection, Zurich exhibition).

The inhabitants' itineraries move beyond the *collection place* and, through time, have become caught up with other places encompassing a specific "region." Among these are: various places in the Chaco, some of whose names have been transmitted, while others got lost with someone's memory, *Erami* and *Cojñone-Gari*, the metropolis Santa Cruz; two very different museums in La Paz (MUSEF) and Filadelfia (*Museo Jakob Unger*) and an unknown number of zoological collections worldwide with birds from *eramone*, the landscape of (university) museums in Germany (Bonn, Frankfurt, Berlin) and Switzerland (Basel, Zurich), including the BASA Museum's database, the online portal, and the honey exhibition with Comai's story now wayfaring online. With everything we do not know about them, the manifold transfers of the Ayoréode's artefacts from the Chaco—whether for academic purposes, personal pleasure, maybe as a possibility to earn something by selling them at higher prices, or as gifts for an old friend—to the BASA Museum via purchase, loan, or donation, speak of, and are part of Ayoréode history and heritage.

Notes

- 1 This article is partly based on a previous publication by Rattunde (2020b), which elaborates in more detail some of the things outlined here in abbreviated form.
- 2 There might be older Ayoréode objects in other collections. The National Museum of the American Indian, for example, holds two objects of the "Tsirakua", a historical foreign ethnonym for the Ayoréode, purchased by George Heye from J. F. G. Umlauff in 1930 in Hamburg (see [https://americanindian.si.edu/collections-search/search?edan_fq\[\]=set_name:%22Tsirakua%22](https://americanindian.si.edu/collections-search/search?edan_fq[]=set_name:%22Tsirakua%22), last access: 07/11/2022). The second oldest scientific "Ayoréode" collection is that of Lucien Sebag at the Musée Quai Branly. Interestingly, the objects were not catalogued as "Ayoréode" but with the names of the two local groups among which Sebag collected in 1963–1964 (see <https://collections.quaibranly.fr/>, last access: 07/11/2022).
- 3 Trimborn, who founded the *Seminar für Völkerkunde* and initiated the building of its collection in 1948 (see Noack 2015), went on an expedition to Bolivia in 1955/1956 (like Kelm), from which he brought nearly 250 objects for the collection, among them two arrows classified as "Ayoréode."
- 4 Howard and Maxine Morarie joined the NTM in 1950 and started working with Ayoréode in 1952 in Tobité and later in Campo Loro, where their daughter Patricia (Morarie-)Jolly, now a lecturer in Anthropology at the University of Northern Colorado, started to assist her parents (see <https://ayore.org/es/biografias/>, last access: 16/11/2022).
- 5 The respective index cards were created in 1976. The earliest list of the entire loan collection controlled that same year, comprises 37 objects from Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, Peru.
- 6 In contrast to the negative *abujádie* figure described above, according to Fischermann (1988, 20–24), the Ayoréode in Yoquiday warmly welcomed him and even wanted him to stay and take the position as the village's leader from the missionary family with of whom they were very critical.

- 7 For further information on the abundant Riester and Regehr collections in Basel, see the inventory list (www.mkb.ch/docroot/pdf/MKB-Bestandesliste-IVc_Sued-amerika-Karibik_2022_189-MB.pdf, last access: 17/05/2023).
- 8 They are supported by the Swiss-based Foundation and Association for the indigenous communities in Paraguay founded in 1997 (see www.indigene-paraguay.ch, last access: 07/11/2022).
- 9 The Hausmann collection comprises approximately 280 objects, the majority from Paraguay (most from the Nivaculé, some from the Ayoreode, Enlhet, and Manjui) next in addition to several from other parts of the Americas acquired through art trade.
- 10 The relations we established through these gatherings continued: Carla Jaimes Betancourt attended the ceremony the Ayoreode celebrated for Riester after his death in September 2019. Naomi Rattunde presented the exhibition catalogue at APCOB's offices in October 2019. Furthermore, both of us supported APCOB during the application phase for a project funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation to digitize Riester's and APCOB's audiovisual archive and the BASA Museum will contribute to the database being created in this project with relevant data.
- 11 See www.musethno.uzh.ch/static/ayoreode/, last access: 10/05/2023.
- 12 See https://kosmos.uni-bonn.de/wisski_basa/, last access: 17/11/2022.
- 13 See <https://ccc.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/>, last access: 17/11/2022.
- 14 See www.cp3c.org/, last access: 17/11/2022.

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6 Towards Democratising the Formation of Knowledge

Researching Sensitive Collections from Namibia Collectively

Julia T. S. Binter

Introduction

Then there was this doll that really spoke to my soul. As a designer, I could see that this doll was made by a child. Maybe a child that was sitting under a tree with her grandmother, who took pieces of the fabric of her grandmother's dress and started making her own. I remember as a child, being half Herero and half German, I asked my grandmother why women wore so many petticoats. That was after us being forced into Victorian dresses, being told that our skin is not good enough. Her answer was that women were scared of being raped.

(Cynthia Schimming in Röhrig and Vetter 2019)

Cynthia Schimming's (1953–2022) skillful and affective reading of a doll in the collection of the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin highlights the many forms of knowledge she brought to bear during her research stay at the museum in the spring and summer of 2019. She combined her expertise as a fashion designer and her knowledge of the history and artisanship of such dolls with her personal experiences of growing up in an OvaHerero–German family in Namibia. This also entailed the painful sharing of transgenerationally transmitted traumas of violence against women during colonial occupation, war, and genocide that German troops committed against OvaHerero and Nama in the then German colony, today's Namibia, between 1904 and 1908 (Binter and Fine 2020). Cynthia Schimming's sensibility to historical experiences and skills hitherto ignored and silenced in the colonial archive and her openness to share her multifaceted knowledge allowed light to be shed on a type of object—a hand-sewn, 23 cm tall figure (Figure 6.1)—and historical experiences of women and children connected to it, which would have probably gone unnoticed in the collection of over 1400 objects from Namibia housed at the museum in Berlin. Together with six curators, artists and historians from Namibia¹ and researchers and curators from Berlin,² Schimming traced the colonial entanglements of the collections, discussed their historical and cultural significance and developed plans for

how, by whom, and where the objects or “cultural belongings” (Buckridge 2004) should be cared for, handled, and presented in the future (Binter, Fine and Förster 2020).

In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which the Namibian–German team, including myself as provenance researcher and project coordinator, attended to and translated between various forms of knowledge, such as the critical reading of colonial archives, oral histories, skills in fashion and design as well as performative and embodied or, in other words, “sensuous” knowledge (Salami 2020). I also look at the political and institutional context in which the collaborative research at the Ethnologisches Museum, the curating of an exhibition about the research process at the Humboldt Forum,



Figure 6.1 OvaHerero girl not recorded, doll, *ombopi*, “Uaṭunua,” probably bought by barter by the missionary Carl Gotthilf Büttner in 1879, donated to the Königlichen Museum für Völkerkunde in 1888, Inventory number, III D 1300, Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz, returned to Namibia in May 2022, currently housed at the National Museum of Namibia. © Photo by Claudia Obrocki, 2019.

and the return of selected cultural belongings to Namibia took place. I argue that while our efforts to plurify the formation of knowledge with museum objects did indeed uncover hitherto silenced historical experiences and forged new, decolonial futures for selected cultural belongings, our collaborative research also formed part of a powerful, politically, and historically infused process of heritagisation (Meyer and de Witte 2013). Given the colonial histories and legacies of the Ethnologisches Museum and the Humboldt Forum (No Humboldt 21; Sarr and Savoy 2018; Binter et al. 2021; Penny 2021), I finally ask whether they can still become open spaces for the democratisation of knowledge formation with and through things (Sternfeld 2018).

Confronting Colonial Pasts

Scholars in critical museology have long argued that the institution museum was a product of socio-political changes in Europe and global imperial expansion of the long 19th century. They have traced its “birth” (Bennett 1995) from the aristocratic cabinets of curiosities or *Wunderkammer* (Impey and MacGregor 2017) to the founding of the British Museum in 1753 or the opening of the Louvre Palace to the public during the French Revolution (McClellan 1999). Museums, thereby, embodied the “dialectics of enlightenment” (Gilroy 1993; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002; Binter 2017, Vawda 2019). Whereas the opening of private, often royal collections to the public bore the promise of democratisation and enlightened citizenship in newly forming nation-states, new forms of categorising and publicly exhibiting things—often from contexts of colonialisation—formed hierarchised notions of selves and others (Bennett 1995, 2004). Museums, according to Tony Bennett, were part of an “exhibitionary complex,” consisting, inter alia, of world fairs (Geppert 2010), human zoos (Blanchard, Boetsch and Jacomijn Snoep 2011) and museums, which began to specialise as museums of natural history, art history and anthropology or ethnography (Thomas 1991; Barringer and Flynn 1998; Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Gosden and Knowles 2001). Museums rested on the material appropriation and ocularcentric exhibition of the world (Preziosi and Farago 2004). Particularly, ethnographic museums became what Annie Coombes (1994) has called “temples of Empire” where the collecting and exhibiting of things from a variety of religious, artistic, and performative contexts altered their ontological status. Whereas things might have formerly been used to connect with ancestors or to fashion sartorial identities, they were now objectified, that is put behind glass to indexically reference foreign people who were imagined living at a different place in a different, most often, ahistorical time (Fabian 1983; Karp and Lavine 1991; von Zinnenburg Carroll 2017). In brief, ethnographic museums were a mass medium of the colonial period and a powerful regime of knowledge formation, which shaped exoticising and racialising notions of selves and others.

The insights of the “Writing Culture” debate in social anthropology (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Behar and Gordon 1996) and, more generally, the postcolonial turn in the humanities (Young 2001; Steyerl and Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2003; Eggers et al. 2005; Varela and Dhawan 2005) as well the pressure of antiracist and postcolonial activists, artists, and intellectuals (Ayim et al. 1986; Hügel et al. 1993; Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland e. V. 2006; Ha et al. 2007; Sow 2008; Kilomba 2013; Bergold-Caldwell et al. 2016; Kelly 2016) have pushed museums to confront their colonial legacies, trying to find appropriate ways of collecting, caring for, and presenting things in a postcolonial world (Karp et al. 2006; Noack and Kraus 2015; Binter 2017; Brücke-Museum et al. 2022). More and more people working in such museums have become aware of being part of a powerfully charged “contact zone” (Pratt 1992; Clifford 1997; Boast 2011) where different forms of knowledge about material culture and different ways of engaging with pasts, presents, and futures come into dialogue, causing frictions as much as mutual inspiration (Binter 2019). They have been testing new forms of “sharing cultural heritage” (Buijs et al. 2010) and “sharing knowledge” (Scholz 2017) with the aim to forge more equitable forms of transcultural relations (Golding and Modest 2013; Reyels, Ivanov and Weber-Sinn 2018). Moreover, scholars and curators like Laura Peers (2013) have highlighted the potential for social healing in communities afflicted by colonial legacies of economic exploitation, cultural oppression, and the expropriation of land by reconnecting museum objects with descendants of those people who once created, owned, and used them.

In Germany, the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin occupies a particular position in the debate about the history and future of ethnographic museums. Situated in the capital of the former German Empire, the museum played a key role in shaping how German militaries, missionaries, administrators, merchants, and scientists acquired things during often brutal colonisation and colonial occupation (Ankermann and von Luschan 2020 [1914]). It was, also, where all spoils of German colonial wars were first accessed and then distributed to other museums in the Empire. Founding figures like Felix von Luschan (1854–1924) became notorious for amassing human remains for dehumanising, racialising studies as well as for writing African art history from Eurocentric perspectives (Le Gall and Mboro 2019; Binter et al. 2021). Today, over half a million objects from Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Pacific as well as an additional 500,000 audio recordings and photos are housed at the Ethnologisches Museum, testifying not only to the collecting mania of the colonial period but also to the world’s manifold cultural and artistic expressions (Penny 2021).

In 2002, the German Bundestag decided to partially rebuild the former Prussian palace at its original location in the centre of Berlin and to move, amongst other things, the exhibitions of the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst there (König and Scholz 2011). The rebuilt castle was to become the Humboldt Forum, named after two prominent

figures of German enlightenment, Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt, and was intended to show Germany's worldliness and enlightened past. From its inception, the project was accompanied by protests from post-colonial activists and criticism in the press and from academia (No Humboldt 21; Berliner Zeitung 2019; Maak 2020). Why should the largest cultural project of reunified Germany be situated in a rebuilt castle, not only eradicating the history of the German Democratic Republic which had destroyed the original palace and built a Palace of the Republic in its place, but also referencing a form of government that had nothing to do with Germany's democratic present and future (von Bose 2016)? Why was the building's entanglement with Prussia's trade in enslaved people (van der Heyden 2001) and the German Empire as a colonising force (van der Heyden and Zeller 2002; Conrad 2011; Perraudin et al. 2011) not kept in mind when conceiving it? In other words, why were the dialectics of German enlightenment and the long colonial history of the site not adequately considered? Moreover, from the mid-2010s onwards, questions about the colonial provenance of the cultural belongings to be exhibited at the Humboldt Forum became more prevalent and reached their peak in Bénédicte Savoy's affective request to know how much "blood is sticking to the objects" (Deutschlandfunk Kultur 2019). Together with the Senegalese philosopher Felwine Sarr, the French art historian published a report on "The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage" and argued for a general return of collections from colonial contexts to their regions of origin. They emphasised that the acknowledgement of colonial wrongs and the return of cultural heritage had the potential to lead to "new relational ethics" between Africa and Europe (Sarr and Savoy 2018).

It was in this institutional context, accompanied by heated public debate, that the collaborative research project on the collections from Namibia at the Ethnologisches Museum was developed. Keenly aware of the political momentum surrounding the two museum sites and the particularly violent, entangled histories of Germany and Namibia (Förster, Henrichsen and Bollig 2004; Zimmerer and Zeller 2016; Kößler and Melber 2017), Jonathan Fine, curator of the collection, Larissa Förster, Namibia expert and academic advisor, and I, as provenance researcher and project coordinator, sought to create a safe space to work through the, at times, retraumatising histories and experiences that were connected to the museum objects. Moreover, we sought to create a research environment where our partners from Namibia could set their own research agendas and methodologies. Already in 2014, the late Jeremy Silvester (1949–2021), director of our main institutional partner the Museums Association of Namibia (MAN), had initiated the "Africa Accessioned" program with the aim to "locate and list the objects held in the diaspora of African ethnographic collections in European museums" (2019, 55). His insights into collections from Namibia in Germany and Europe allowed him to identify some of the unique features of the collection in Berlin, such as the early acquisition of a large number

of cultural belongings which could be traced back to missionary contexts before official colonisation by the German Empire in 1884. The emphasis on items of clothing, accessories, and jewellery in the collection led him to propose a research focus that interpreted the collections not only as witnesses of colonial contact but also as an archive of Namibian fashion and design. Whereas we, in the Berlin team, sought to analyse the colonial entanglements of the collections and, in particular, any relations to the colonial war that escalated into a genocide against the OvaHerero and Nama (1904–1908), our Namibian research partners sought to look forward and use the historical collections as inspiration for contemporary artists and designers. As the collaborative research unfolded, it became clear that both movements in time—confronting colonial pasts and envisioning creative futures—depended on and informed each other.

Listening to People and Things

Nehoa Kapuka-Kautondokwa's gloved hand slid carefully over the lavishly adorned doll. "The glass beads were very expensive; a row of them was exchanged for a cow. If a doll was decorated with them, it was something really valuable," the historian and MAN's museum developer explained to us standing in the storeroom of the Ethnologisches Museum (Figure 6.2). Harking back to previous research she had already conducted on the history of the Aawambo Kingdoms (Museums Association of Namibia 2019) as well as "listening closely" to what the doll's materials and techniques were



Figure 6.2 Nehoa Hilma Kapuka-Kautondokwa Cynthia Schimming and Julia Binter with *okanona* Olugondo in a storeroom of the Ethnologische Museum in Berlin. Film still from *Tracing Namibian–German Collaborations*, a film by Moritz Fehr © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2020.

able to tell her, Nehoa would reveal much more information about the doll. Together, we set out to retrace its roots and relational histories.³

Combining our insights from colonial archives, oral histories, and primary and secondary publications, Nehoa and I were able to reconstruct not only how the doll had entered the collection of the museum in Berlin but also trace its history back to the persons who once owned and used it, thereby uncovering experiences and agencies of the people who were most often silenced in the colonial records: women. It was Omuyekadhi or Queen Olugondo of Ondonga, an Aawambo Kingdom in the north of today's Namibia, who presented the doll to the German–Finnish missionary Anna Rautanen. The occasion may have been Anna's marriage to Hermann Tönjes, a missionary of the Rhenish Mission, in 1900 (Peltola 2002, 224–225). In his book “Ovamboland” (1911, 133–135), Tönjes described the importance of such dolls and especially the story of Queen Olugondo's gift to his wife. Anna was born in 1878 in Ondangwa, a mission station in the Ondonga Kingdom, as the daughter of the Finnish missionary Martti “Nakambale” Rautanen and the German missionary Anna Frida Friederike Kleinschmidt. As a child, Anna owned a European doll. Perhaps out of admiration for the doll, most probably because of their close relationship, the Queen gave Anna's doll her name: Olugondo. When Anna Rautanen returned to the kingdom after an educational stay in Europe, she left her doll there. In Europe, adult women no longer played with dolls. In the Kingdom of Ondonga, however, dolls were much more than just toys. They were an essential part of growing up as women, as oral histories conducted by Nehoa and other team members in Namibia revealed, teaching them about child rearing, social relations and, also, sexuality. Girls were given dolls by their relatives. When a couple became engaged, the fiancé gave the doll a new name that the first child of the couple was to bear. Was Anna now to marry without an *okanona* or “child,” the Oshindonga name for such dolls?⁴ The Queen made a doll according to the latest fashion (or had it made) and gave it, again, her name. Hence, she and the doll were *okadina* or “sisters by name” and the two women had forged a bond that would endure long after Anna Rautanen's move to the neighbouring Oukwanjama Kingdom.

It was the *okanona* that tied the two women together (Figure 6.3). After Anna's departure, the Omuyekadhi had the *okanona* brought to the royal court in a leopard-skin baby carrier to spend time with her. In return, she sent Anna a calabash with beer and a black ox, an animal reserved for the royal family (Tönjes 1911, 135). What could have been the reason for this cycle of gifts? Did the queen want to make sure that her namesake was well looked after—as was customary for such an *okanona*? Or, was it a way to keep in touch with Anna Tönjes after her marriage and departure? Tönjes' publication does not give answers to these questions, even though his description hints at the fact that the doll had become a materialisation of the women's special relationship.



Figure 6.3 Omundonga artist not recorded, doll, *okanona* “Olugondo,” given by Omuyekadhi (Queen) Olugondo to Anna Rautanen (married Tönjes) in 1900, sold by missionary Hermann Tönjes to the Königliche Museum für Völkerkunde in 1909, inventory number III D 3656, Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz, returned to Namibia in May 2022, currently housed at the National Museum of Namibia. © Photo by Claudia Obrocki, 2019.

In addition, the *okanona* was able to reveal even more than the relational histories between powerful African kings and queens, Finnish and German missionaries and the negotiation of religious and cultural relations. She also embodied the fashion and prestige of the royal court of Ondonga. “The clothes, with some modifications, are still worn by women in the kingdom today, linking the past with the present,” Nehoa explained to us. “The *okanona* can therefore be considered an archive of Namibian fashion.” Hertha Bukassa, Cultural Officer and research partner from Namibia, explained the significance of the individual fashion elements:

Onjeva was and is a piece of jewellery made of ostrich egg shells that young girls wear around their hips; *Oshilanda*, a highly prized dark blue glass bead, adorns her upper body; a series of large buttons imported from Europe serve as a substitute for the precious and rare *omba*, a piece of jewellery made of ivory or shell.

Omuyekadhi Olugondo, therefore, only used the most precious materials that Nehoa had immediately recognised at the beginning of our collaborative research.

Retracing the special relationship between the Omundonga Queen and the German–Finnish missionary also highlighted the potentials and challenges of postcolonial provenance research. Hermann Tönjes, who wrote the doll’s story in his book “Ovamboland” (1911), was less interested in conveying the interests and experiences of the two women than in the general description of “Land. People. Mission.” He did not even relate to his readers that “Fräulein Rautanen,” as described in the book, was his fiancée and later wife. However, we owe him a rare photograph of Omuyekadhi Olugondo—as part of a family portrait of her husband King Kambonde (II) kaMpingana (Figure 6.4).



Figure 6.4 Photographer not recorded, © National Archives of Namibia, inventory number 00437, caption of an identical photo: “Chief Kambonde II of Ondonga. On the right principal wife Olugondo. On the left his son,” in: Tönjes, Hermann. *Ovamboland: Land. People. Mission*. Berlin: Verlag von Martin Warneck, 1911, 143.

Tönjes' contradictory treatment of the two main characters in the *okanona* story points to a general problem with publications and archival materials from the colonial period. The historical sources with which postcolonial provenance research usually begins were largely written by European men and reflect the exoticising and racialising views of the time. Their male counterparts in the colonies were scarcely mentioned. Furthermore, the views and experiences of women, children, and otherwise marginalised people, such as enslaved people, were hardly ever written down or archived. As a result, archives from the colonial period are always one-sided and incomplete. How should we deal with these resulting gaps and silences? Can those voices, which were not heard then and were not considered worthy of archiving, be made audible today?

One possible access to these silenced persons is through their material creations, which are stored in depots all over the world and are largely unexplored (Pearce 1990; Barndt and Sinopoli 2017; Basu 2017). But not everyone can understand them. It requires someone like Nehoa Kapuka-Kautondokwa, who, as an expert in the history of the Aawambo kingdoms and their trade and missionary relations, recognised the importance of the *okanona* and was able to “listen to” or “read” its material evidence.

Thanks to the cooperation with our Namibian partners, the *okanona* is much more than just a “doll” that the German missionary Tönjes sold to the Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde (today's Ethnologisches Museum) in 1909. She tells of the friendship between two women, their growing up and the fashions of their time.

Sensing History

Listening to cultural belongings and listening to people—past and present—is an intricate, but considerably straightforward process, if the sources with which we can retrace their voices are written or orally transmitted, such as in the case of the *okanona*. We can rely on decades of expertise in social and cultural anthropology on oral histories (Vansina 1985; Werbner 1998; de Jong and Rowlands 2007; Mark-Thiesen et al. 2022), in the critical examining of the archive in history (Stoler 2002, 2009; Senier 2014; Azoulay 2019) and the growing number of scholars and curators who “think with things” (Byrne et al. 2012; Harrison et al. 2013; Basu 2017). It gets more complex when we start engaging with knowledge which hitherto has had little recognition in curatorial and scholarly work, in particular with regard to experiential and embodied knowledge. Yet, our research partners repeatedly brought to bear their embodied forms of knowledge in the process of examining cultural belongings, retracing their histories, and linking them to deliberations about body, gender, and land. Cynthia Schimming's reading of the hand-sewn doll from a mission station in Otjimbingue, today's central Namibia, with which I opened this text, is a strong case in point. I will now return to Cynthia's research with the collections and sketch the theoretical

framework that sustained my engagement with and understanding of the embodied knowledge that she so generously shared with us.

When I see this doll wearing only a petticoat and the dress isn't there, I think of the women who are being raped. It's an emotional journey to work with these objects, it's really not easy. You cannot walk out of the depot at night and be happy. Yes, one can be fortunate that they [museums in Germany] have preserved some of the objects and students in Namibia can see them [as part of the follow-up project]. But looking at the objects and how they got there brings anger and tears.

(Cynthia Schimming in Röhrig and Vetter 2019)

Scholars of the senses have long argued that we have to overcome the Cartesian divide between body and mind and body and material world in order to fully understand how people create knowledge in and of the world (Seremetakis 1996; Bull et al. 2006; Edwards, Gosden and Phillips 2006; Lankauskas 2006; Bennett and Joyce 2010; Diawara, Lategan and Rüsen 2013; Meyer and de Witte 2013; Meyer and van de Port 2018b). They understand embodied knowledge as sensually, emotionally, and mentally incorporated modalities with which people relate to things, broadly understood as “images, artefacts, bodily fluids as well as spaces and technologies” (Houtman and Meyer 2013, 17) and, via them, “make sense” of the world. Or, in the words of postcolonial feminist writer Minna Salami:

we need an approach to knowledge that synthesizes the imaginative and the rational, the quantifiable and the immeasurable, the intellectual and the emotional. Without feeling, knowledge becomes stale; without reason, it becomes indelicate.

Salami continues with reference to Yòrùbá philosophy: “We need knowledge that affects the interior as well as the exterior. *Ogbon-inu* [knowledge-of-the-gut] and *ogbon-ori* [knowledge-of-the-head]. Sensuous knowledge.” (Salami 2020, 14)

Moreover, in acknowledging embodied or “sensuous” knowledge, these scholars also call into question Eurocentric notions of temporality, making the chronological and teleological reconstruction of historical events one among many forms of relating to the past. For postcolonial provenance research, this means that we have to open up to radically different forms of relating people, events and things in time and space—a lesson which also Cynthia Schimming taught us throughout our collaborative research process.

Cynthia's ways of “sensing history” challenged the information that I was able to reconstruct via a critical reading of the colonial archives. While I read through 8 years of correspondence between the missionary Carl Gotthilf Büttner (1848–1893) and the Rhenish Mission Society in Germany (at the archive of the Vereinte Evangelische Mission in Wuppertal), seeking to find

hints on how he had acquired the doll and 139 additional cultural belongings from OvaHerero, Nama, and ǀNūkhoen backgrounds during his time at the mission station at Otjimbingue (1873–1879), Cynthia kept circling back to the question of skill and the status of children in OvaHerero society and missionary contact. I had initially interpreted the doll as a tool of colonisation, teaching young girls at mission stations, by sewing such dolls, how to dress differently, the aim being to fundamentally change their ideas of body and gender. Cynthia, however, read the uneven stitching on the doll's dress as a trace of an OvaHerero girl's hand who started learning how to sew with cloth, leading to questions about the active acquisition of skills during missionary contact. In Cynthia's eyes, the doll was a turning point in OvaHerero fashion history that had been as much forced upon as it was self-determinedly acquired and further developed. When I finally established, via a publication of Büttner (1884), that the missionary had most probably bought the cultural belongings via barter in 1878–1879 (Binter and Fine 2020), Cynthia replied with an insightful question, "And who took the doll from the child?". Had it been her parents, the missionary himself? Cynthia thereby pointed to the experiences of children, which neither colonial records nor oral histories nor contemporary research questions had adequately considered. What is more, the doll's corporality and, in particular, its missing upper skirt forced Cynthia to confront colonialism's violent impact on women's bodies, which she had carried with her through her family history and which revealed a much broader horizon of often highly traumatic colonial experiences than would have been possible through a critical reading of archival sources.

It was this dialogue of different forms of knowledge that constituted our joint research and that constantly required new forms of translation and understanding. For the sensuous and sensitive knowledge she shared with us, Cynthia found a particularly powerful translation. She gave the doll her Otjiherero name, "Uaṭunua," meaning "touched." The name is intended not only to refer to the many hands that created, acquired, gifted, inventoried, and preserved the doll, but also to the violence that women had to experience and overcome in colonial wars and genocide. Hence, naming the doll or *ombopi* in Otjiherero established an intimate relationship between Cynthia and the small female figure, perhaps in a similar vein as Omuyekadhi Olugondo had done by naming her gift to Anna Rautanen a century earlier. What is more, the symbolic reappropriation or naming of the *ombopi* entailed a challenge to Eurocentric forms of temporality when engaging with historical museum objects and their histories. Missionary encounters in the 1870s and the genocide from 1904 to 1908 were not separate entities to be placed on a chronological timeline, but rather layers of historical experiences that infused each other and informed the ways in which Cynthia engaged with the collection in Berlin. Such "palimpsest" ways of relating to the past (Shaw 2002; Basu 2007) are rarely written down, but rather sensed, embodied, and performed. In other words, they invoke forms of knowing beyond the Western academic canon and highlight the importance of plurifying the formation of knowledge about and with things.

Tying Networks of Knowledge

Museums are sensory places, yet Eurocentric regimes of care and display have limited the ways in which people can engage with collections, mostly allowing only for an oculacentric relation with things (Edwards, Gosden and Phillips 2006; Karp et al. 2006; Howes 2014). This was not always the case. Constance Classen and David Howes (2006), for example, have highlighted the multisensory engagement with things in private and early public collections in 18th-century Europe. Things were smelled and, particularly, touched as “an essential—and expected—means of acquiring knowledge” (2006). Yet, at the same time, as private collections became public, European scholars were starting to differentiate between higher and lower senses, giving preference to sight over hearing, taste, smell, and touch. Whereas the first was favoured as a sign of civilisation and was sought to be refined in settings such as the museum (Duncan 1995), the others were associated with primitiveness and ascribed to women, children as well as rural and foreign people. Hence, arguing for an engagement with and understanding of “sensuous knowledge” tackles these gendered and racialised hierarchies of the senses and of the ways in which people make sense of the world.

For the conceptualisation of the exhibition at the Humboldt Forum (opened in September 2021), we, in the Namibian–German team, sought to translate our collaborative efforts of listening to things and people for a wider public. We decided against a classical presentation of objects, but rather to focus on the relationships of people with things, highlighting the plurality of forms of knowledge that made our collaborative research possible. In an act of “productive refusal,” as Golda Ha-Eiros, lead curator on the Namibian side, coined it, we also decided not to show any original cultural belongings, but use high-resolution photographic reproductions instead. Firstly, the decision was born out of necessity. From the very beginning, our Namibian research partners had made it clear that they wanted to select cultural belongings to bring back to Namibia, arguing that the majority of knowledge that could be reconnected with the cultural belongings resided with the people in Namibia. In a long, arduous selection process, the seven experts nominated by MAN as well as two selection committees in Namibia, comprising scholars, curators, artists, and community representatives, established the criteria and narrowed the number down to 23 cultural belongings which were to travel to Namibia not solely due to their provenance but due to their cultural and historical significance. These were the 23 cultural belongings that we had collected the most knowledge of and that we wanted to relate to the public. Secondly, our “productive refusal” was in reaction to the exhibition history of the collections from Namibia in Berlin—to our knowledge, there had been not a single exhibition on material culture from Namibia in the 20th century—and to the underlying value systems. That is to say, the richly embellished items of clothing, jewellery, and accessories do not fall in the categories of material culture from the African continent established in Europe. They

have not been considered “African art,” understood as sculptural figures and masks formerly used in religious contexts and whose creators were not recorded (Price 1989; Vogel 1991), and they were, therefore, not considered worthy of exhibiting. Thirdly, we considered the highly contested context of the exhibition—the Humboldt Forum—and its grand framing narratives of Germany’s enlightenment and outward-looking past. Refusing to display original cultural belongings for aesthetic, ocularcentric consumption and highlighting the many forms of knowledge that we had reconnected with them, encouraged visitors to listen to people and things—past and present.

Finally, we sought to formulate an argument against the *horror vacui* or, in other words, fear of museums becoming empty if they start returning cultural belongings to their respective regions of origin. The exhibition highlights instead what we gain when we start researching colonial collections in an open-ended and collaborative way and let cultural belongings travel. The symbolic translation of these arguments is two “Networks of Knowledge,” relating 8 of the 23 selected objects (in their photographic presence/absence) with historical and contemporary photographs and our manifold comments on them (Figure 6.5). Like in a conversation, the texts all start with a question, which members of the Namibian–German team as well as oral historians and elders from Namibia, who had been interviewed for the project, answered. Every speaker is identified by name and conveys his or her knowledge in their figure



Figure 6.5 Network of Knowledge, part of the exhibition “Confronting Colonial Pasts, Envisioning Creative Futures” at the Humboldt Forum, opened in September 2021. © Photo by Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2021.

of speech. Hence, the exhibition can be seen as an experiment for rethinking the formats and role of museum exhibitions, by shifting away from the display of cultural belongings and authoritative labels towards establishing processual and open spaces where a multitude of perspectives and voices from the past and present come into democratic dialogue and envision creative futures.

We do not view knowledge as something that can be accessed, and assessed, through the arts and their connection with emotions, senses, and embodied experience. ... Yet art is also suited to explaining reality because art captures reality from the inside out. Art explains who we are because our existence is artful.

(Salami 2020, 12–13)

Very much in line with Minna Salami's argument for art as a conduit for translating our experiences of making sense of the world, the exhibition also includes two artistic positions that both reconnect the museum objects with people and land. The German filmmaker Moritz Fehr accompanied the research with the cultural belongings in Berlin and Namibia. His film installation "Tracing Namibian–German Collaborations" conveys what reconnecting and creating knowledge with these cultural belongings felt like, focusing on touch and Cynthia's affective research into German–Namibian histories. It also shows the ways in which German colonial history in Namibia continues to shape not only the museum collections but also the everyday life of people in Namibia to this day.

Cynthia Schimming transformed her research on the object, audio, and photo collections in Berlin into a multilayered and self-empowering reflection on the impact of colonialism on the body (of women) and land.⁵ Her untitled work consists of two parts. Firstly, Cynthia incorporated her research into precolonial OvaHerero fashion into a contemporary OvaHerero dress. The cut, with puffed sleeves and a wide petticoat, is based on Victorian dresses, resembling the dress that Uaṭunua is wearing. The headgear of the fashion ensemble (*ojtikaiva*) references the shape of cattle horns and refers to the proud, precolonial past of the OvaHerero as cattle herders. A special feature of the dress is the pattern that adorns the hem of the skirt. It shows an *ekori*, the elaborately made leather headdress decorated with iron beads that OvaHerero women wore before German colonisation. The drawing of the *ekori*, which was silk-screened onto the hem of the dress, goes back to an illustration in the catalogue of the 1896 Trade Exhibition, the first German colonial exhibition, in Treptower Park in Berlin (Working Committee of the German Colonial Exhibition 1897, Plate XXVI). Cynthia turned a visual trace of Germany's colonial claims to power (Berlin Postcolonial 2017) into evidence of the precolonial fashion and artistry of OvaHerero people. The jewellery for the fashion ensemble consists of bracelets and necklaces that the designer bought on the market in Namibia, as a sign of cultural continuity and resistance. In

dialogue with the screen prints of the *ekori*, the contemporary jewellerys refer to a history of creative self-determination beyond colonial violence.

The second part of the installation focuses on another key object in the collection: a leather patchwork blanket made by unrecorded Nama artists and acquired by the Königliche Museum für Völkerkunde from the estate of Gustav Nachtigal, the first governor of the German colonies in West Africa. In 1884, Nachtigal authenticated the fraudulently signed land contract between the Bremen tobacconist Adolf Lüderitz and the Nama captain Josef Frederiks II, starting the formal colonisation of Namibia. It might have been in this context that he acquired the patchwork blanket.⁶ Today, the blanket is read as evidence of the long history of patchwork in Namibia, questioning preconceived notions of patchwork as art of scarcity and revaluating it as an aesthetic principle for artistic creation. Schimming transferred the pattern of the blanket onto a more than 6-m long fabric and printed it with historical photographs from the collection of the Ethnologisches Museum (Figure 6.6). In the Humboldt Forum, the fabric takes on the stylised form of a landscape.

In the photographs of the colonial period, especially after the OvaHerero and Nama genocide, the Namibian landscape was often depicted empty, without people, to promote the settlement of the colony. My installation



Figure 6.6 Cynthia Schimming, “No title,” part of the exhibition “Confronting Colonial Pasts, Envisioning Creative Futures” at the Humboldt Forum. © Photo by Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2021.

does the opposite. It shows all those people who shaped Namibia then and still do today: Nama, Herero, Damara, Ovambo, San and Germans.

By silk-screening historical photographs onto the fabric, Cynthia Schimming inscribed the bodies of resistance fighters, victims of colonial violence, and German military personnel in the landscape. She understands the body itself as a site of colonial experiences that enables her to articulate history beyond the Eurocentric, written archive. Moreover, body and landscape work together to create a gesture of self-empowerment. The fashion ensemble takes on the form of a female figure, towering over the visitors, pressing her right arm against the side of the vitrine. With her left arm, she is grabbing the landscape, pulling it behind her. Taking a step back, visitors can perceive the full commotion within the vitrine. The female figure is trying to break-free of her encasement, taking everything with her: the land, the people, and their histories. The performance of the installation-in-motion is, as storytelling, based on multilayered translations between past and present and between different forms of knowledge, constantly challenging our concept-based approach to collections from colonial contexts. As Cynthia Schimming put it on an inscription at the back of the vitrine: “My philosophy versus your interpretation.”

Returning Home

On 30 May 2022, the 23 selected “cultural belongings” as Goodman Gwasira from the University of Namibia reframed the museum objects with reference to Steeve Buckridge (2004) during their homecoming, among them *okanona* Olugondo and *ombopi* Uaṭunua, were officially welcomed home. At a press conference at the Independence Memorial Museum in Windhoek, high-ranking representatives of all partner institutions as well as of the funding body, the Gerda Henkel Foundation, that had made the return and subsequent research with the cultural belongings possible, underlined the importance of the cultural belongings for filling gaps in the cultural heritage of the country. After the conference, a young woman approached me in the storage room of the National Museum of Namibia, where the cultural belongings are currently housed. “Is this the doll you spoke about? The doll of Queen Olugondo? You probably meant Queen Koko Olugondo. She was my great-, great-grandmother. I will let my family know that she has returned.” Within a day, the return of the cultural belongings had sparked new links and relationships.

Our Namibian partners have fleshed out concrete research strategies with which to support these kinds of reconnections. MAN opened a new museum—the Museum of Namibian Fashion—in Otjiwarongo, developing further their decolonising reading of historical cultural belongings as archives of Namibian fashion and design in dialogue with contemporary designers. The National Museum will now embark on an in-depth community research process that

roots the knowledge formation with the cultural belongings in the heritage communities themselves. Last, but not least, M.A. stipends in History at the University of Namibia enable young scholars to develop innovative ways of writing history with the cultural belongings from Namibian perspectives.

“Heritagisation” is a process, as Birgit Meyer and Marleen de Witte (2013, 276) have pointed out, in which things and cultural forms are more generally selected according to aesthetic and political criteria and “are—more or less persuasively—canonised.” The collaborative research and making of exhibitions with the cultural belongings in Berlin, their selection for the return home and the subsequent multimodal research with them can be seen as such a process of heritagisation. This process took place on shifting grounds. In Germany, the project was framed by the institutional context of two colonial heritage sites—the Ethnologisches Museum and the Humboldt Forum as well as the heated public debates surrounding them. At the same time, cultural politics were changing. Research into the histories of collections from colonial contexts was intensified, for example, with the initiation of a new funding line for postcolonial provenance research at the German Lost Art Foundation in 2019 and the creation of four permanent positions for postcolonial provenance research at the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, the umbrella body of the State Museums of Berlin, of which the Ethnologisches Museum is part (Binter et al. 2021). Moreover, the museums’ and politicians’ willingness to return cultural goods from contexts of colonial violence and injustice to their regions of origin increased significantly (Deutscher Museumsbund 2021; Savoy 2021; Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien 2024). Hence, the return of cultural belongings to Namibia can be seen as a culmination of these developments as much as a trailblazer.

Beneath and beyond these shifting cultural politics and the resulting expectations, we sought to make the process of collaborative research, curation and restitution as open-ended and sensitive to a plurality of forms of knowledge as possible. Being highly aware of our dispositions as *white* researchers working in institutions with historically grown, postcolonial power structures, we invited partners to conceive the project with us. It started with the setting of research agendas together and ended with our project partners choosing the criteria according to which cultural belongings were selected to return home, among them generation, gender, and artistry. It turned out that questions of provenance, such as contexts of colonial injustice, were less important than the cultural and historical significance of the cultural belongings. In other words, the selection was less oriented towards righting colonial wrongs from German perspectives, by, for example, predominantly choosing looted cultural belongings. It was rather based on the question what belongings lent themselves to rewriting histories from Namibian perspectives and envisioning creative and decolonial futures with them. Highlighting historical and cultural significance as key selection criteria, rather than colonial violence and injustice, marked a considerable

shift in the discourse and practice of restitution from Germany to the African continent.

Another key difference from other requests for restitution and returns to the African continent, such as the case of the so-called Benin Bronzes to Nigeria (Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien 2022), the sacred statue of Ngonso to Cameroon (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin 2022) or the Witbooi whip and bible to Namibia (Kößler 2019), is the kind of historical experiences and expressions linked to the cultural belongings. Most of them are not symbols of political, often male power, but rather things used and cared for by women and children. Cultural belongings, such as *okanona* Olugondo and *ombopi* Uaṭunua, materialise experiences marginalised in the colonial record, which we were only able to uncover by going beyond Eurocentric forms of knowledge formation. It was thanks to our research partners' generous sharing of skills in fashion and design, oral histories as well as embodied and sensuous knowledge that allowed for hitherto silenced persons, such as women and children, to become part of the process of heritagisation. In other words, the plurification of knowledge with and through things made it possible to ask not only what, but who is historically and culturally significant and to whom. Hence, the return and subsequent research and reconnections with the cultural belongings in Namibia have the potential to rewrite histories from hitherto marginalised perspectives. Furthermore, it will be exciting to see what futures can be developed based on these new, more diverse ways of historical narrations.

In this sense, plurifying knowledge formation in the powerfully charged context of museums meant creating spaces where different forms of knowledge about pasts, presents, and futures were valued in their own right, allowing as much for discrepancies and contradictions as for fruitful dialogue and complementation. Learning from this collaborative research experience, I argue that museums can indeed fulfil their inherent promise of democratic relation-making if they confront their institution's and collections' colonial pasts and legacies and listen to their research partners on how to envision futures with them.

Notes

- 1 The Namibian team consisted of office manager and designer Ndapewoshali Ilunga (formerly Ashipala), today's director of the Museums Association of Namibia, cultural officer Hertha Bukassa, curator Golda Ha-Eiros, today's senior curator for the ethnographic collections at the National Museum of Namibia, archivist Werner Hillebrecht, historian and museum developer Nehoa Kautodonkwa, artist and fashion designer Cynthia Schimming and director of the Museums Association of Namibia Jeremy Silvester
- 2 The German team consisted of curator Jonathan Fine, today's director of the Weltmuseum Wien, project coordinator and provenance researcher Julia Binter, today's Argelander Professor for Critical Museum and Heritage Studies at the

University of Bonn, collection managers Luise von Bresinski and Juliane Padluschat, research assistant Kolja Drescher, conservator Eva Ritz, designer Renate Sander, academic advisor Larissa Förster, today's Head of the Department for Cultural Goods and Collections from Colonial Contexts at the German Lost Art Foundation, and filmmaker Moritz Fehr.

- 3 The description of the collaborative research into the entangled histories of the doll (inventory number III D 3656) is based on Binter 2020.
- 4 The Oshindonga name for the doll is taken from the historical book by Tönjes (1911) and might contain errors. Research partners in Namibia are currently conducting further research into the history of such dolls and their Omundonga names and significances.
- 5 The description of Cynthia Schimming's artistic research and creation process is, in part, an English translation of a German article by Binter and Fine (2020).
- 6 I am very grateful to Werner Hillebrecht for contributing his expertise in German colonial history in Namibia to researching the provenance of the blanket.

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Part III

Epistemic Cultures
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7 The Afterlives of Gold Antiquities from Southeast Asia

Digging and Collecting for the Art Market in Indonesia

Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz

Introduction

Archaeologist Andreas Reinecke (2015, 130–1) assumes that today we have access to less than 5% of all uncovered prehistoric gold objects in Southeast Asia. This is a biased viewpoint based on the scanty amount retrieved from controlled archaeological investigations in contrast to large quantities of artefacts of unprovenanced origin, from looted sites or which have been lost. Locational information given by stratified contexts allows dating and gives essential insights into cultural relationships and the historic context, whereas unprovenanced archaeological material found in private acquisitions or museums often lacks this information. However, this material is important because it essentially forms part of the knowledge production.

In looking at the phenomenon why ancient gold works were afforded a higher status, it is useful to look at the socio-cultural value attached to them and made them worth collecting. Political scientist Benedict Anderson postulates (1998, 154–6) an “archaeological push” in Southeast Asia in the early 20th century. He argues that there was a tendency towards prioritising archaeologica on the basis of an idea of guardianship and self-grandeur. The preservation of monuments was in the hands of the colonial authorities who made them symbols of “regalia for a secular colonial state.” (Art) historians Maraike Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff extend this view back to the 19th century Indonesia (Bloembergen and Eickhoff 2020). In contrast to Anderson’s state-centred concept, they follow a local, transnational, and global interaction at the ground level by arguing that heritage awareness was influenced by local developments beyond state-driven initiatives.

My aim in this chapter is to highlight why and how transformations, contestations (distrust, countered reliability, biases), or exclusions (loss, theft) of knowledge take place. This focus explains stages of (re)appropriation. By using multiple sources such as archive material, press clippings, and fieldwork, I will show that knowledge production on historic gold artefacts is created by archaeological, historic, curatorial, or collector’s expertise—thus addressing separate actors from practice. The local context is brought in by highlighting the digging out of archaeological finds by Indonesians

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on the islands of Java and Sumatra. My field studies in 2018/2019 at two digging sites were not without danger because the diggers were afraid of being discovered and did not want anybody to witness their activities for fear of being prosecuted. These experiences were only made possible due to the network and support of two collectors who introduced me to their dealers.

Knowledge engagements produced in the *Ethnological Museum* of Berlin (EM) address provenance research. The study of the accession and acquisition records allows the gathering of knowledge on the kind of material acquired in the museum and on material that existed but was lost. Six gold rings will be presented in connection to their collecting histories. I follow the concerns of collectors and staff of the museum to be able to combine these perspectives and understand their relations. The chain of transfer after the objects were found or dug up and handed over by locals is far from comprehensive, but these investigations point to a wider and controversial stock of knowledge on this material group than the small amount of gold coming from controlled archaeological investigations.

Entanglement between Materiality and Attributed Value

The afterlives of gold artefacts are especially meaningful, because silver and “gold is never thrown away” (Bennett 2009, 102). Due to its assigned monetary value, this metal has constantly been melted, recycled, and reshaped. For instance, in the 19th century, taxpayers on the Dieng-plateau on Java settled their debts by melting down ancient gold treasures (Eggebrecht and Eggebrecht 1995, 54). Another way of reappropriation is the response to heritage protection laws by melting the historic items into bullions in order to avoid police interference (Miksic 2011, x). The authentication of gold by scientific methods has been highly ambiguous. Although archaeometric analyses allow the determination of the chemical content or composition of the surface and the metallurgical and technological condition, the dating of unprovenanced gold depends on art historical and stylistic evaluations, as well as connoisseurship (Tjoa-Bonatz 2019a/b; Tjoa-Bonatz and Lockhoff 2019).

Due to these material qualities as well as the rising market value in the international art trade, Southeast Asia has suffered an unprecedented loss of precious metal, in part through colonial and religious appropriation,¹ theft, looting, and illicit trafficking; these have resulted in collections of these artworks now being located in many parts of the world. The looting and trade of antiquities from religious and archaeological sites continues to increase with the use of modern communications and better means of detecting buried objects (Glover 2015, 240).

During their fieldwork, archaeologists frequently note that looting occurs where they work (e.g., Pryce, Bellina-Pryce and Bennett 2008, 309; Pautreau, Kyaw and Coupey 2010, 48; Reinecke 2015, 127). Historian Horst Liebner (2014, 183, ft. 106) estimates that about 20% of the larger pieces of gold were smuggled out of the sites by Indonesian divers during the recovery of

the 12th century Cirebon wreck. During fieldwork, archaeologists, local finders, and their families face life-threatening situations by rival treasure hunters. The threat or use of force comprise abduction, displacement, and name change, as was reported when the “Surigao treasure,” gold jewellery weighing 10 kg, was discovered by a machine driver on Mindanao, Philippines in 1981 (Capristano-Baker 2015, 20–21). In Yogyakarta on Java, a family underwent traumatic events and therefore stopped investigating the killing connected to a gold theft.²

According to the Cultural Heritage Advocacy Society of Indonesia, a museum watch organisation in Indonesia, the theft of museums’ objects has occurred over the past years in major museums in their country. In 2010, 87 ancient pieces including gold jewellery were taken from the exhibition halls and storage rooms of the Sonobudoyo Museum in Yogyakarta, the country’s second largest museum. The items are made of 18-carat gold, which has a lower value than pure gold, so the criminals probably did not melt the items down for their material but focused on the assigned heritage and historic value (Sri Wahyuni 2010). In five cases of robbery in the National Museum in Jakarta gold was in focus. In 1979, thieves stole the museum’s precious coin collection. In 2013, burglars took four golden artefacts from the Mataram era of the 8/9th century, estimated to be worth US\$ 176,000 per item (Anonymous 2013a/b). The profile of the art crimes shows that, in particular, popular gold artefacts of better-known and specific periods—furnished with inscription, ornaments, or anthropomorphic images—are the focus of theft. It is assumed that collectors were behind the violent acts of dislocation executed by professionals and helpers. Archaeologist John N. Miksic (2018) confirms that, in Cambodia, there is an organised syndicate which offers to steal specific items.

In 2005, an auction of 12 Buddhist gold and silver statuettes of the 7/8th century has polarised the debate on whether such items are Indonesian heritage and should not be sold-off in the country of their origin. The auction house in the Netherlands estimated the figures to be worth between US\$ 5,000–56,000 but was obscure about the provenance (Christie’s Auction 2005, lots 176–87; Anonymous 2005a/b). According to Paragraph 5a of the National Act no. 11 of 2010 (amendment to the original Act of 1992), any item older than 50 years which carries historic, scientific, or cultural value should not be taken out of the country without governmental permission (Presiden Republik Indonesia 2010). However, the Ministry of Education and Tourism did not claim the statuettes, because neither their provenance nor their unlawful appropriation could be proven.

A range of publications has started to highlight illicit trade in and restitution aims regarding antiquities from Southeast Asia (Beurden 2012; Hauser-Schäublin and Prott 2016; Tythacott and Ardiyansyah 2020). Scholars and investigative journalists have documented illicit ownership of cultural material. Some cases of the restitution of gold objects from collectors, European and American museums after illicit trafficking or loot have gained

an international audience (Paviour 2017; Pech Sotheary 2018a/b; Boffey 2020). The capuchin missionary museum in Nijmegen in the Netherlands returned silver earrings to a regional museum in Balige on Sumatra after it was closed. Still, many are not claimed by the countries of origin due to the lack of credibility.

Archaeologist Ian Glover (2015, 249) explains the scholarly bias. There are those who refrain from dealing with or even reporting on illicitly excavated or traded antiquities, their renouncement acquiring an ethical dimension, and others who do so because they want to document the material as fully as possible in order to balance historic information which would not exist otherwise. The German Archaeological Institute is of the opinion that unprovenanced material should not be visualised in their publications (Reinecke pers. comm. 14 November 2021). Due to the growing number of private collectors' publications that might contain illicit material or fakes, the integrity of the data must be addressed if using references to antique metals for dating or as an historical source. The display of fabulous private collections in museums and catalogues serves to increase the monetary value of the material, but their credibility is doubted. Alternative ways to overcome this scholarly bias is proposed by the historical researcher Wayne Bougas (2007) who combines excavated data and material obtained by Indonesian diggers so that it is possible to outline a more comprehensive cultural history of gold artefacts from Sulawesi. Archaeologist Victor Estrella (2018) has pursued in-depth ethnographic and observational approaches with Philippine diggers to gain understanding of the illicit trade of Butuan.

Digging for the Art Market in Indonesia

Land Sites in East Java

Cultural material was found extensively in the southern parts of Lamongan and Bojonegoro in East Java between 1960–2010. My informant, a 61-year-old local antiquities dealer, showed me sites of his digging activities where he, together with two companions, searched for gold jewellery and other valuables. Gold said to be uncovered by the kilo in earlier decades, were found together with pre-Islamic artefacts such as beads, bronze items, ceramics, and bones at burial sites or former religious places indicated by brick structures. Such artefacts were also retrieved from riverbeds where the cultural material was washed out from former settlements or gravesites (Figure 7.1; Tjoa-Bonatz 2019a).³ I establish the dating horizon of the sites as the Majapahit period of the 13–16th century due to the collected surface material, e.g., Chinese potsherds of the Sung to Ming period (10–17th century), Thai and Vietnamese imports. He used specialised equipment such as a gold weight and a metal stick for digging down to a depth of 1 m; he also provided storage and networks to sell the material. Over time, he developed an expertise in assessing the value of gold pieces and other sellable



Figure 7.1 Digging for artefacts in East Java. © Photo by Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz.

material. Farmers supplemented his collection of artefacts or diggers from other regions exchanged finds. My informant sold the items to a locally based and affluent intermediary agent in the town of his district who in turn offered them to antiquities dealers or collectors. Today, a 30-year-old man, trained by my informant at the age of 17, keeps his contacts going, but he has moved further to the east where he digs out antiquities in Tanggul Jember, East Java as part-time job.

There is a local memory regarding the Majapahit past. A resident of Watu Umpak village in the Trowulan district asserts that most locals believe that taking anything belonging to the Majapahit kingdom could bring them bad luck or could lead to their death, and so they returned the valuables to the place where they had taken them. This spiritual belief refers to the way how object finds are important to the local history of the East Javanese. These objects represent a tenuous link between memory and place. Other residents who found historic valuables reported the findings to the authorities, but sometimes received no response (Harsaputra and Jayakarna 2009). This weakness of the archaeological services allowed local contestations. The pressures of poverty and easy convertibility of gold into cash are more reasons for digging out archaeological material.

River Excavations in Southeast Sumatra

During sand extraction, workers realised that certain areas at the bottom of the Musi River at Palembang in Southeast Sumatra were particularly rich

in artefacts. These antiquities have been dug out in a large scale since 2011 by locals and are dispersed in the international art market (Miksic 2012). The river was a major artery of commerce where the Srivijaya emporium of the 7–13th century connected the gold-bearing highlands. By the 19th century, Palembang identified as the centre of the Srivijaya kingdom, fuelled archaeological activities and local nationalism (Bloembergen and Eickhoff 2020, 173–93). The journalists’ allegedly new archaeological discovery stories of “long-lost” worlds and tropes of the “Island of Gold” should be read with scepticism (e.g., Kingsley 2021; Pappas 2021). Collectors defend their gathering practices and publication of material from the Musi River by claiming they offer the opportunity to enact archaeological morals by “making available” heritage “endangered by looting” and “document a representative collection” from threatened contexts; in this, they ignore the fact that they are part of this valorising processes (Kitchener and Kustiarsih 2019, xv–xvi). However, a large part of the Sumatran heritage from the Srivijaya era would not be documented otherwise. No publication has ever been dedicated to its gold artefacts.

Jewellery found in Palembang, probably of the 7–13th century, include pendants, earrings, chains, gold beads, and a particularly rich variety of gold rings such as intaglio or seal rings with script, rings with zoomorphic or geometric motifs. This repertoire alludes to Hindu–Buddhist iconography of the Srivijaya period. The heavy ring with the Sanskrit *śrī*-letter on a trapezoid bezel is raised on a lotus cushion (28 × 34 cm, 49.9 g, Figure 7.2). Alluding to the Hindu goddess of the same name, the consort of god Vishnu, the word

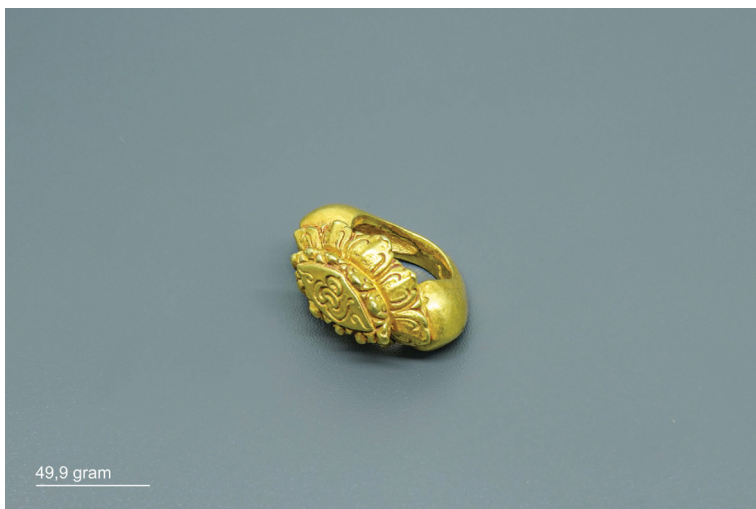


Figure 7.2 Ring with the *śrī*-letter on lotus decoration from Palembang, probably 7–13th century. © Photo by private collector.



Figure 7.3 Ring with fish-motif surrounded by a dotted rim from Palembang, 11–13th century. © Photo by private collector.

addresses fertility, prosperity and luck (Bosch 1927, fig. I.d, II.d; Miksic 2011, pl. 34; Tjoa-Bonatz and Lockhoff 2019, 35–38). The motif of a fish above a lotus surrounded by a dotted rim can be associated with Indian coins from the Chola-period (985–1014) explained by close trade connections between South India and Sumatra (28 × 30 cm, 45.5 g, Figure 7.3; Tjoa-Bonatz and Lockhoff 2019, 40–41; Tjoa-Bonatz 2019b, 84). Encrusted rings often hold a carnelian as centre stone, probably originating from South India, in a bezel or prong setting (Tjoa-Bonatz 2019a, fig. 8). A small ring holds a carnelian with a potentially zoomorphic motif in a raised and beaded bezel setting (23 × 21 cm, 6.4 g, Figure 7.4). The four claws of a prong setting serve as mere decoration as seen in the lotus ring with geometric motif (25 × 26 cm, 26.4 g, Figure 7.5).

Depending on the tide, 14–17 boats, each manned by 3–4 men and a captain sets off and searches for cultural material on the riverbed. On the island Kemaro, 14 families are engaged in digging on the riverbed. They see themselves as rightful heirs of the sites and in this way justify their right to the river's treasures. Not only their marine knowledge but also their ethnonym as “Malay” constitute a common identity and engender self-confidence towards the outsiders. Called “the children of the river,” thus connected to Sumatra's seafaring people, they promote their culture of “traditional” diving and claim to act “instinctively” (Anonymous 2021). They have excellent onsite orientation. Due to their knowledge on the tide and currents, the divers determine safety factors, the varying starting times, and length of the dives.



Figure 7.4 Encrusted ring holds a carnelian with a potentially zoomorphic motif from Palembang, 7–13th century. © Photo by private collector.



Figure 7.5 Ring with geometric or śrī-motif from Palembang, 7–13th century. © Photo by private collector.



Figure 7.6 Refurbished fishing boat used to search for gold and antiquities in the Musi River. © Photo by Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz.

Their equipment is evidence of technical knowledge to suit the current needs. The refurbished wooden fishing boats are equipped with a suction pump held by a diver to scour the riverbed (Figure 7.6). The sand is sieved on a noisy, self-made, petrol-run platform where two men sort out valuable larger material or waste on a grid. The fine sand collected is treated with mercury to extract gold. Afterwards, the highly toxic sand is spilled into the river, a cause of severe pollution (Tjoa-Bonatz 2020). One crewmember of each boat dives for about 30–60 min in up to 30 m depth searching for artefacts from the riverbed while moving the suction pump. The divers' self-made hookah breathing system, sometimes sponsored by their dealers, consists of a long air hose that delivers air to the diver by an air compressor and is fastened to a mask. An iron chain is used as weight and a cotton bag serves to collect items (Figure 7.7; Kingsley 2021, 91). Connected with a rope to a standby person on the boat, the divers exchange codes which are only known among their group when finds were made and the divers want to be lifted. Their breathing system allows them to stay longer and dive deeper underwater than snorkelling would, whereby minimal equipment is involved with less interference to the diver's range of motion and lower costs. However, inadequate safeguards and contamination of the motors powering their compressors put divers at high risk. Several fatal accidents have happened, as reported by my informant on the boat. The divers wear neither a diving suit nor gloves



Figure 7.7 Diver searching for antiquities and gold in the Musi River. © Courtesy of Wreckwatch magazine/Photo by Sean Kingsley.

so that they quickly experience hypothermia and their hands are frequently injured while searching for artefacts on the bottom of the river.

Immediately after the dive or at least on the next morning, various competing local dealers come to the fishermen's houses and buy the marketable material (Figure 7.8). After deducting the cost of the petrol and mercury, which are provided by the captain, and the daily bribe for the police, the proceeds are equally shared among the crewmembers. Some of the dealers also maintain a storage room, and the more affluent ones own an antiquity shop in Palembang. On recovery, the value of gold is assessed based on the weight, whereby the actors on the transit market add on marketable characteristics and play out their networks in order to manipulate, monopolise, and control the marketing of the artefacts, therewith raising the price. The dealers also change the meaning of the artefacts, assigning rarity, and attach historic value to the objects to comply with the destination markets, which include international collectors and other cultural elites. During my fieldwork in summer 2019, the rising value of the antiquities is reflected in the following transactions of gold artefacts per gram:

1 g = 41 € (local diver)

1 g = 1.794 € (local antiquity dealer)

1 g = 7.175 € (collector in Jakarta, Bali, or abroad)

Due to technological and logistical advances such as social media platforms, internet, global express shipping, or instantaneous money transfers, the



Figure 7.8 Trading gold dug out of the Musi River. © Photo by Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz.

market has widened and transactions can be made quickly. Gold antiquities are being consumed by national and international collectors who send their trustworthy antiquities dealers out to the diggers' sites. Singapore or Hong Kong are the main gateways for the international art market. Sellers are now prioritising highly prized and small-size antiquities that are easier to ship, which makes gold items predestined for this market segment. Collectors consult scholars and curators to get a positive confirmation that their material is genuine so that it will be included in the scholarly discourse; this also increases their monetary value. However, if significant proportions of a collection are evaluated as untrustworthy, the entire collection will not be taken seriously and will not be incorporated into the "academic pantheon" (Miksic pers. comm. 29 June 2016). Collectors are thus eager to exhibit

their collection or sell parts to museums and thereby raise the market value of their collection.

The Trajectories of Knowledge in the *Ethnologisches Museum* of Berlin

Objects from Southeast Asia were part of the Royal Prussian Art Collection (*Preussische Kunstkammer*) and were acquired after the foundation of the *Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde*, today the *Ethnologisches Museum* (EM) Berlin, in 1873. In 1906, 126 objects within the “Indian Department” were moved to the Museum of Indian Art (today the *Museum für Asiatische Kunst*). This division into a collection of “arts,” including archaeologica, and another one of ethnographica is neither clear-cut nor consistent as the following antiquarian gold rings will show.

It was first in 2021, 5 years after I brought up the existence of ancient jewellery that they were finally found in the storage of the EM of Berlin. Various factors contribute to the gaps in transparency and accessibility of the museum’s resources. The allocation of objects in this vast storage follows a regional, conservational, and functional order while subregions are arranged functionally. This organisation partly reflects the physical order of the material and requires special search aid. Conducting provenance research on the 20,000 objects which are exhibited at the Humboldt Forum in Berlin of the EM, the largest museum of its kind in Germany, and the *Museum für Asiatische Kunst* would require at least 277 years to complete.⁴ Provenance research demands excellent infrastructural resources, plentiful staff, and staying power for maintenance and updating the registration methods. These are the main obstacles for knowledge production on the basis of provenance research.

First, neither a continuous nor a full inventory has ever been taken of the collection (today called “Fachreferat” or “department”) of South- and Southeast Asia. The exact number of objects in the collection is not known. Contradictory figures of the total amount of this collection are suggested based on different parameters. Before World War II, the catalogue counted 35,000 entries including music instruments, media, and photos (Höpfner 1973, 321). During and after World War II, the losses may exceed 5000 objects.⁵ In the 1950s, 836 musical instruments were transferred to the ethnomusicology department. Curator Roland Platz (2022, 73) assumes that the collection contains around 35,000 objects—among them 7000 objects from Indonesia—in addition to 5000 historical photos. However, by the end of 2022, the museum’s database contained up to 50,330 objects, not including 3800 media/photos and 2705 group entries from South- and Southeast Asia.⁶

Second, the digitisation and accessibility of sources are still limited. By January 2022, in total 23,412 objects were digitised; this is a considerably small number in comparison with other departments of this museum. Although digitised index cards are a basic means of locating objects, only 1138 cards can be assigned to objects in the museum’s storage of South- and Southeast Asia. The inventory books of 1857–2008 are available online,

but the acquisition files were just being digitised at the time of my research. The reading of the hand-written documents by use of OCR text recognition was limited. The organising principles of the abbreviations used by the staff and relocated compilations of location cards in prewar times have yet to be studied thoroughly. Copies of the main accession catalogue which include additional information on the acquisitions and concordance lists with 8195 entries taken between 1839 and 1880 allude to the fact that new accession structures were introduced.

Third, a documentation of institutional losses enables tackling the illegal traffic in cultural property about stolen and missing items. The existence of two anthropomorphic images from the Philippines would not be documented otherwise.⁷ A cast figure of a sitting female with a child on her back from the Igorot in Bontor, North Luzon was acquired from G. A. Baer, based in Manila, in 1880. And, a seated male with both arms folded on his chest (height: 53 mm, 61.6 g, Figure 7.9) from the district Lepanto in North-Central Luzon was purchased from Dr. Baekmann in 1883, a secondary school teacher in Haldersleben. The purchase price of 200 marks, equivalent to about 1140 € (in January 2022),⁸ was higher than the cost estimate of 130 marks proposed by Adolf (1826–1905), the founding director of the *Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde* in Berlin. This reveals the high interest of the museum in this piece. The iconography of the figure alludes to a gold-plated statuette from Batangas on South Luzon made in memory of an ancestral figure associated with Late Metal Age material of 200 BC–1000 AD found in a private collection.⁹ Investigating the losses in museums helps to fill the deficiencies in our knowledge of gold artefacts of Southeast Asia.

Collector Jacob Anthonie Dieduksman: Faked and Genuine Archaeological Finds

In 1871, Jacob Anthonie Dieduksman (1832–1901), a Dutch colonial administrator and collector in Yogyakarta, Central Java, offered 72 items, “a collection of weapons and antiquities of the Buddha and Hindu time,” to the museum. Presented in accurate handwriting with many decorative curves, his letters encompassed a long list of objects written in Dutch and German. Emphasising that he is a Dutchman living on Java, his writing is most polite, almost ingratiating, which may derive from linguistic adaptations or was intended to optimise his selling strategy. His offer of antiquities includes 19 bronzes and 7 weapons of the Hindu–Buddhist period between 7th and 16th century, additionally items of post-16th century: weapons, curiosities, shadow puppets (*wayang*), 25 rings mostly set with stones and made either of gold or copper, paintings, and photography. Some objects bear exact dates while the use of others is documented between the 16th and 19th century.¹⁰ Dieduksmann displays an eagerness to provide provenance and contextual information on each piece of his collection. The antiquities were either dug up at ruins (among them the temples of Borobudur, Prambanan, and Sewu); others were found during earthworks, sulphur mining, after a fire or flooding

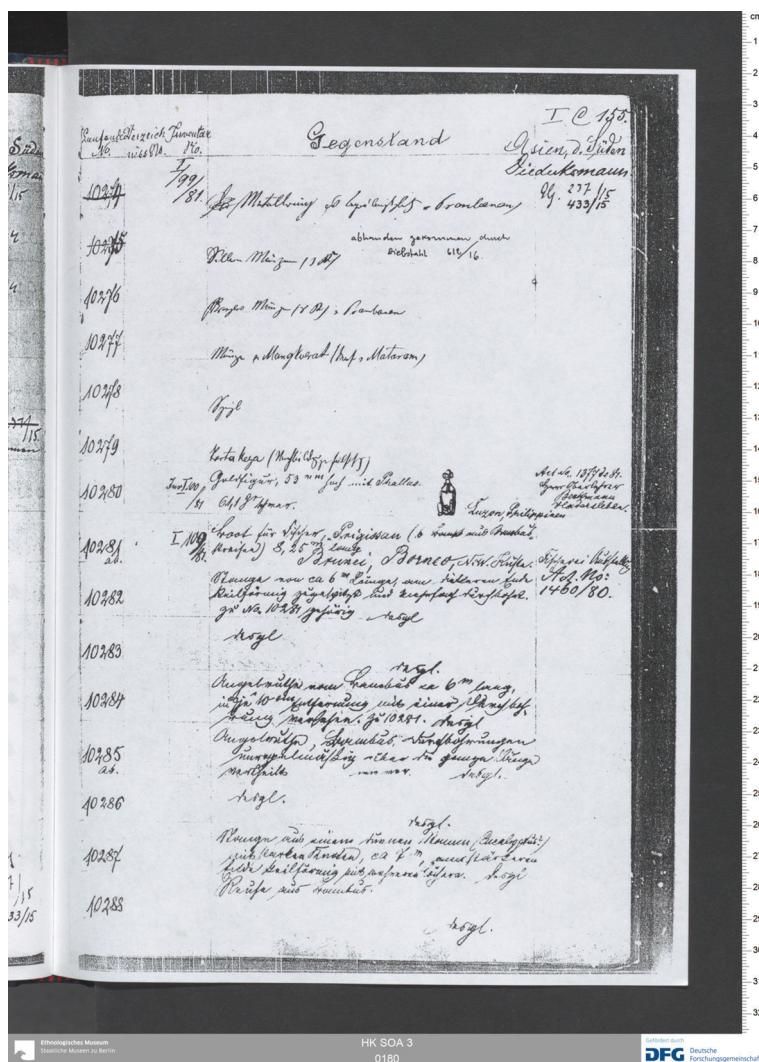


Figure 7.9 A bad photocopy of the original inventory of the Ethnological Museum in Berlin exists in the museum's archive and shows a drawing of a gold statuette from the Philippines. © No copy-right required.

at other Central Javanese sites. Some weapons are claimed to have belonged to royal personages such as a *kris* (dagger) of 1825 of which only the golden handle was left purportedly belonging to Prince Diponegoro (1785–1855), a national hero of Indonesia.¹¹ Dieduksman, a self-taught art specialist, had acquired his knowledge from a Javanese informant (Driënhuizen 2019, 39).

With a Javanese wife and born in Yogyakarta, he had easier access to local knowledge and probably also used his position to negotiate objects that were inherited or came from religious sites.

In 1873, Bastian empathically endorsed the acquisition of the “antiquities” and “relics” from “old Java” on the basis of Dieduksman’s chronological and locational information on the objects and their histories.¹² Bastian is uncritical about the fact that most antiquities derived from uncontrolled excavations, probably looting, and hence feature chance finds. The museum’s director took an implicit position for the Hindu–Buddhist period of Java described as “Javanese–Indian culture,” hence “classic.” His interest is triggered by Javanese objects of the 8–16th century, only appreciated for their supposed Indian connection. He followed a common scholarly practice by treating South- and Southeast Asia as a single cultural region following an idea of a spiritual “Greater India” as “moral geography” in the knowledge production (Bloembergen 2021). Bastian also highlights the importance of “Hindu–Buddhist and Brahman” religion for the study of Java’s ancient history, but totally ignores Islam as Java’s predominant belief.

In 1881, Dieduksmann donated “rarities” from Java to the museum intended to serve scientific interests and complete the museum’s collection.¹³ According to the collector, the material was dug up from an old well: an arm ring with Arabic letters said to be more than 1000 years old, an anthropomorphic “Arabic talisman” made of silver with an inscription, three “golden Buda-rings with inscriptions” and “a small Buda-coin.” The Javanese word “Buda” refers to the Hindu–Buddhist period understood as a syncretistic religious and chronological reference (Bloembergen and Eickhoff 2020, 102). He allegedly suggests a dating to the 9th century on the basis of Arabic script and not Sanskrit, though the latter would be rather expected in the Hindu–Buddhist context.

The shank of the first ring swelling to the shoulders holds a pointed, oval-shaped bezel with *śrī* written in positive (4.9 g, 2.1 × 0.8 cm, Figure 7.10: second row, left).

The weight of the ring nearly conforms to two units of a *masa* (2.4 g), a gold-standard weight that is widely used in Asia. Rings presented in certain gold weights appear on temple lists of the 9/10th century in Central Java as purity, faith, good-luck, or propitiatory gifts (*simsim pasada/prasada*) in founding rituals or presented to a shrine. An inscription of 882 from Magelang, Central Java records a total of 53 rings among which 18 rings are of two *masa* in weight (Christie 1993, 3; Tjoa-Bonatz 2018).

The shank of the second ring is folded and attached to a hexagonal-shaped, flat bezel (4 g, 1.9 × 0.9 cm, Figure 7.10: second row, centre). Here, a central, deeply drilled circle is flanked by two wavy lines which are set opposite to each other. Together with six radiating drop-like shapes, a star-like pattern is created. This geometric design still refers to the *śrī*-motif. Both rings can be dated to the 7–12th century and suggest a central Javanese origin due to their



Figure 7.10 Gold rings from Indonesia, 7–19th century, Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, Germany; first row from left to right: inv. nos. I C 31153, I C 37092, I C 33976, IC 10741, IC 10743, IC 10742. Photo by Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum, © Claudia Obrocki.

stylistic-technical rendering, the motif, and weight (cf. Bosch 1927, fig. V.b–e, VI.a; Miksic 2011, pl. 34).

The third ring is lightweight with a slender shank broadening to a pointed oval shape (2.2 g, 2.0 × 0.7 cm, Figure 7.10: second row, right). A circle connected to wavy lines and bordered by two bands of striations is engraved on it. The flat geometric design is sketchy and hardly reflects the *śrī*-design. The surfaces of the edges are not smoothed and show striations on the inside of the shank. This poor quality in gold smithing as well as a missing antique parallel does not allow a more precise dating than post-16th century to pre-1881. The rings were dug up in an uncontrolled excavation so that the time horizon of the cultural layers could range up to the 19th century when archaeological finds were frequently discovered as a result of land clearance and urbanisation, fuelling the rising lucrative antiquities market. It is most likely that the ring is of younger age or has even been intended as a fake.

In 1882, doubts were raised about his connoisseurship, alleging that faked bronze statuettes were part of Dieduksman's donation of 78 entries in Dresden. Around 1900, a Dutch archaeological commission attested that he had intentionally forged antique Hindu–Buddhist statuettes. Historian Caroline Drieënhuizen (2019, 39) argues that short entries of the inventory

are conclusive evidence that Dieduksman introduced rarely seen objects in Germany to obscure the determination. Implicitly connected to her argument is that the museum's staff could not identify them properly. This is not the case in the Berlin Museum. Two months later, after Dieduksman's objects arrived at the museum, they were registered by Bastian. Although his entries are brief, they sufficiently record basic information (material, function, location) and make the correction that the engraving does not constitute writing. He ignores the dating suggestion of the collector. Probably due to this fact, these antiquities were not deemed as such and were thus not transferred to the collection of the *Museum für Asiatische Kunst* as were other parts of his collection in 1906. The written sources and objects reflect partly contradicting levels of knowledge between the collector and museum's staff.

*Collector Baron Joachim Maria Heinrich Freiherr von Brenner-Felsach:
A Ring of Unknown Provenance*

In 1900, the museum in Berlin acquired 247 objects of Baron Joachim Maria Heinrich Freiherr von Brenner-Felsach (1859–1927), an Austrian traveller, photographer, and author. Among this collection is a large open ring which allegedly originates from Java. This information indicated on the location card by the curator lacks in the list of objects by the collector.¹⁴ The plain band of semi-cylindric profile has overlapping ends with slightly tapered, flat faces (20.9 g, 3.0 × 0.7 cm, Figure 7.10: first row, left). The gold sheet is beaten and folded over a metal core.¹⁵ According to Miksic (pers. comm. 2 January 2022), such a plain ring seems to show up in many times and places on the mainland and islands of Southeast Asia. The heavy weight and large diameter are less suitable for a finger or foot ring. The narrow gap between the ends would allow it to hook into a cord, textile, or the hole of an ear lobe. Both, the provenance and ring's use, are unknown.

On the baron's estate in Gainfarn near Bad Vöslau, Austria, the artefacts were "very well labelled," though congested and stored in various poorly lit service buildings. After Albert Grünwedel (1856–1935), the director of the South Asian section in the Berlin Museum from 1904 to 1921, visited the collection and collegial agreements with the ethnological museum of Vienna were made, both museums acquired a large part of von Brenner-Felsach's collection. Apart from a regional interest in the ethnographica and photography in order to add artefacts which were not yet represented in the Berlin collection, other circumstances of the museum were the clear rationales behind the purchase: the peer-review among curators, a presumed good documentation by the collector and, last but not least, the estimated cheap offer for this large collection and the payment by instalments. As the museum's records do not provide sufficient clues on the provenance, function, or dating of the ring, more investigations are needed about the origin and use of the ring.

Collector Conrad Ernst August Prillwitz: Illegal Trade in Antiquities

The German ornithologist Conrad Ernst August Prillwitz (1856–1943) living on Java had been a feverish collector (Tjoa-Bonatz and Lockhoff 2019, 22–4; Tjoa-Bonatz 2019b). In 1899, he started collecting in Garut, West Java, weapons, arts, and craft, later added by “very rare” antiquities.¹⁶ In 1901, he moved to Malang, East Java. In 1903, he sold around 140 objects to the Berlin Museum. Probably more than 600 objects of his collection were shipped to Germany and stored in the premise of his brother-in-law and father-in-law, Joh. Hüssen, in Heimersheim. The stone sculptures were left outside and weathered (Figure 7.12).¹⁷ In 1905, he offered more objects to the Berlin Museum. Prillwitz’ interest in selling is clothed in fine but partly false rhetoric. He claims that, after his wife passed away, he stopped collecting and aims to keep his collection complete by offering the remaining best pieces to the Berlin Museum in order to safeguard money for his children.¹⁸ However, he continued offering collectables until the late 1920s and his family kept an extraordinary gold piece long after his death.

In 1905, he presented his collection in Berlin by choosing five gold objects and three photos of antler, stone statues, bronzes, jewellery, script, and stone tools.¹⁹ For suitable brightness, the objects were grouped outside according to material on a stepped pedestal, which were covered by blankets, a snake skin, woven mats, or cloth that served as photo canvas (Figures 7.11–7.13). The stone sculpture, an ancestor figure, and water spouts on Figure 7.12 are from various religious sites in East Java, for example, from the Shiva-Buddhist temple Singosari or mount Arjuna.²⁰ In his offer of 605 entries, he gave antiquities from Java first priority: 15 sculptures, 60 bronzes, eight pieces of gold jewellery, four stone tools, and two manuscripts on palm leaves.²¹ Items of younger periods and other regions of the archipelago, East Asia and Europe followed: weapons, porcelain, wood and ivory works, cloisonné, stone objects, lacquer, gold- and silverworks, sticks, “varia,” coins, garments, books, and paintings.

Driven by a particular provenance-related awareness, his locational information on each object also addresses the acquisition circumstances. Apart from acquiring antiquities from a European collector such as a gold ring which is lost in the EM, they feature either chance finds such as the stone statues which were found in the forest, river, or dig out such as bronzes in Tengger, East Java. A ring consisting of three wires which are wrapped (13 g, 2.3 × 0.9 cm, Figure 7.10: first row, right) might have been unearthed at Mount Ardjuna near Malang, East Java, although Prillwitz himself raises doubts about this provenance. Horizontally folded waves intersect the wrapping. Similar rings are known from East Java of the 11–16th century, among them others which he sold to the *Weltkulturenmuseum* in Frankfurt/Main in 1913.²² Prillwitz points to geography-related ambiguities when locating imports or using stylistic terms, e.g., Chinese or Japanese porcelain that was obtained on Java or composite pieces which allow various regional references



Figure 7.11 Weapons from Java were offered by the collector Prillwitz in 1905 to the *Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde* in Berlin, today Ethnological Museum © Ethnologisches Museum Berlin inv. no. VIIIVisAnt 357-A).

like a Madura-styled handle set into Javanese swords. Prillwitz shares local knowledge by introducing Javanese terms and cleaning instructions.²³ His expertise in surface treatments and remarks on the packaging reflect his concern with curatorial and restoration tasks, hence underpinning various curatorial levels of knowledge on the collectables.²⁴

Between 1904 and 1908, the ethnologist Paul Oswald Richter (1873–1907) worked for the *Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde*, which sent him on an investigative trip to Heimersheim and the Netherlands in 1905.²⁵ Richter's mediating role as adviser was ambivalent. He benefited from the sale because his commission was charged as a percentage share of the selling price. His reports disclose mainly three priorities as the driving forces behind the museum's decision to purchase the collection. First, the museum was informed by Richter that exporting antiquities from Java was illegal. Since 1840, a regulation of the Dutch Indies, today Indonesia, officially forbade the trafficking of antiquities from Java without the permission of the governor-general, as archaeological objects were defined as “national property” (Bloembergen and Eickhoff 2020, 42). The strongest argument for the purchase—repeatedly emphasised in the museum's correspondence—was that this restriction could be evaded by acquiring a private collection which



Figure 7.12 Stone sculptures from East Java, 9–15th century, were offered by the collector Prillwitz in 1905 to the Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin, today Ethnological Museum © Museum für Asiatische Kunst (SMB-PK, EM HK SOA 18).

was already based in Germany. Second, Richter highlighted the quality of the Javanese gold, e.g., weapons with gold or silver handles deemed “world-wide” to be unique, including one piece which allegedly represents the missing link to the Hindu–Buddhist period. Third, driven by an appreciation of the uniqueness of Prillwitz’ collection and an antiquarian interest, these items were deemed to enlarge the India–Southeast Asian department in comparison with the larger East Asian department within the museum as well as allowing it to play a competitive role internationally, in particular to surpass Dutch museums where comparable pieces were found.²⁶ To reinforce his argument, Richter described the dilapidated conditions of the ethnological museum in Leiden. Prillwitz’s intention to open up a museum and the presence of other competing buyers further fed into the competitive dynamics of collecting and urged the museum to hasten.²⁷ For further inspection, the museum asked for ten objects, favouring visibly precious examples such as a gold-woven textile, a *kris* with gold and silver inlays.²⁸ Following the request, Prillwitz sent more objects of this sensual quality to Berlin. However, he countered the museum’s sole focus on the visual nature of objects by adding an item of advanced age and from prestigious ownership by sending a “very old handle” of a weapon



Figure 7.13 Antiquities from Java were offered by the collector Prillwitz in 1905 to the Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin, today Ethnological Museum © Ethnologisches Museum Berlin inv. no. VIIIVisAnt 358-A.

formerly owned by a ruling aristocracy authority.²⁹ This provenance is particularly sensitive and has to be further investigated, because a *kris* never leaves his owner only through death on the battlefield. When his family can get hold of it, large sums are paid for the *kris* of the deceased.³⁰

Finally, after almost 1 year of negotiations, the purchase in the amount of 34,500 marks, a high price, equivalent to about 213,900 € (in January 2022), was settled in 1906 which coincided with a substantial donation by the Jewish dealer Theodor Glücksmann (1857–?), owner of an inherited fashion and laundry shop in Breslau.³¹ Different to the labelling at the Humboldt Forum or some accession cards, he is neither the previous holder nor the

collector but just the donor. After the museum investigated his liability, he was awarded with the medal in 1907.³² The donation was thus not fully altruistic and imbued him not only with personal pride but also with higher social status—most probably also a marketable category in his business.

Shortly after the collection had arrived in Berlin, doubts were raised about some of the bronze statuettes with remains of gilding and allegedly found in the ground, alleging they were from the early 19th century made by a Javanese artisan (Leemans 1885, 115–7; Stutterheim 1927; Figure 7.13: nos. 1–4, 7–9).³³ Prillwitz backs up his credibility with personal communication with the Dutch government philologist Jan Laurens Brandes (1857–1905) who addresses their style as localised but contemporary to the Hindu–Buddhist period. Richter supports this assumption by referring to far-fetched Minahassa comparisons from North Sulawesi. Again in 1940, due to nationalistic voices against Germany, a Dutch writer held pejorative views on Prillwitz’ gold jewellery by stating that most could not match the quality of those found in Dutch museums (Anonymous 1941, 5). These discourses are best understood as controversial and competing notions imbued with antiquities of unknown provenance.

In 1912, Prillwitz addressed the Natural History Museum in London; in 1913 and 1926, he asked the Berlin Museum for assistance.³⁴ In 2001, his daughter donated an ear plug from the 11–13th century to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, England.³⁵ Private collections are often widely spread, which complicates the research on the collectors’ histories. Although the Prillwitz collection hosted more ethnographic objects than antiquities, the push of archaeological interest in Asia, as well as the institutional museum’s competition, both internally and internationally, supported the acquisition of his collection by ignoring legal restrictions of the country of origin.

Collector At. Merten: A “Sultan’s Ring”

Not much information can be found on the collection of At. Merten (unknown life data) from Java in the museum’s archive. In 1911, At. Merten offered 20 objects to the Berlin Museum such as a “Majapahit” sword (probably a *kris*), jewellery from Bali and Lombok including an inscribed ring (22.5 g, 2.2 × 1.8 cm, Figure 7.10: first row, centre). After some negotiations with the museum’s committee of experts, including Grünwedel who viewed Merten’s collection in Berlin, the deal was settled quickly; five books were given extra and free of charge.³⁶ Jewellery was estimated as the most valuable, with pieces ranging in price from 30 to 500 marks.

The thick shank of the half-round-shaped profile swells to the round and flat bezel which has bevelled edges. The bezel is engraved with a Sanskrit word supported by a convex line. The reading is “MAHAN” and could mean “great” or “the superior (of a monastery),” so far an unknown reading on this kind of ring. It is paleographically attributed to the period 950–1050, similar to two gold rings found on the so-called Intan ship wreck which

sank in the Bangka/ Belitung straits of Sumatra.³⁷ Due to the negative script designed to seal in clay, this type of ring may have been destined to be used as a signet ring (e.g., Machi Suhadi 1999; Gallop 2016, 131–5; Tjoa-Bonatz and Lockhoff 2019, 25 and 53). Rings with inscriptions have attracted many collectors such as Prillwitz who had also owned several Java rings with inscriptions, among them also two similar signet rings of the 10/11th century (Tjoa-Bonatz 2019a, fig. 10).³⁸

Friedrich Wilhelm Karl Müller (1863–1930), director of the East Asian section since 1906, has inventoried the object as a “massive golden seal ring with an inscription from Java.” However, he omits the entry of Merten’s offer in which the ring was bought for 200 marks as a “Sultan’s ring” from Lombok equivalent to about 2190 € (in January 2022) what fits with its heavy weight. This additional information on the former owner alludes to the assumption that it was kept as an heirloom, perhaps also as a status symbol of the (ruling) elite. It is not known when the ring probably made in Java or Sumatra travelled to this East Indonesian island. It is also not known if its ownership in the hands of the local elite changed to a European collector due to the Dutch military expedition to Lombok in 1894. Mechanisms of interpretation and neglect are entailed in the knowledge production.

Conclusion on the Biases of Gold

In 2020–2021, the *Reiss–Engelhorn–Museen* in Mannheim exhibited “Java Gold: Splendour and Beauty of Indonesia” from a private collection which was widely critiqued by scholars and journalists (Ragge 2019; SWR2 2019a/b, Marburg 2019). They argued that neither the provenience nor the legal import of the exhibits was ensured, and that the museum did not partake in the scholarly discussion on critical art-historical and authenticity research. This lack is most obvious in the very broad dating range of 900 years of most of the exhibits.³⁹ This ignorance towards provenience issues violates the ethical convention of the Code of ICOM (International Council of Museums) of 1986, revised 2004. A striking divergence in the museum’s rhetoric is clear. In order to deflect attention from crucial questions about the collection’s origins and authenticity, the museum’s directors justified the exhibition on pure artistic and aesthetic grounds (Wieczorek and Rosendahl 2019). In their eyes, the absence of claims for return raised against the lender’s foundation and publications on the collection are argument enough for the exhibit’s authenticity. Fakes would not be issues for claims. Set on the background of my discussion above about the looting, illicit trade, claims for restitution, and the collectors’ narratives, it is crucial that the *Reiss–Engelhorn–Museen* ignored contested cultural property issues and the potential biases of antique gold from Indonesia.

Gold and silver artefacts from Southeast Asia are appropriated various levels of interpretation and thus serve as powerful agents of historic narratives but also of market mechanisms and illicit trade. These objects are traded,

acquired, or looted; they are stored, lost, or returned, revealing ways of negotiation among divergent parties and their interests. Following Anderson's assumption (1998), it is true that archaeologica and ancient gold jewellery especially from better-known Java were prioritised by the Berlin Museum on the basis of institutional competition and self-grandeur. In addition, there is a local knowledge production created by the diggers or collectors on Java or Sumatra beyond institution-driven initiatives. Reassessing gold artefacts on the basis of provenance research and their collection history provides insights into the ways in which different key agents such as diggers, dealers, collectors, or scholars shape the infrastructure of knowledge on antiquarian objects in Southeast Asia.

Notes

- 1 Early Portuguese and Spanish records indicate that soldiers took buried goods and gold, for example, in Kota Batu, Malaysia in 1587 (Borschberg 2010, 226). In Cebu, Philippines, a royal right on gold and valuables in graves or burial places was issued by the Spanish in 1565 (Capristano-Baker 2015, 18). During the Islamisation period in pre-1500 Kedah, Malaysia, religious images of gold and silver were smashed (Jones 1979, 140).
- 2 My informant wishes to remain anonymous, pers. comm. 22 November 2019.
- 3 Regencies of Kedungpring, Lowangan, Sugio, Temajang, Gedungadem, and Ploso Jombang near the rivers Kalikawi and Bulu Doro.
- 4 Deputy director of the archive Christine Howald (pers. comm. 14 January 2022) assumes an average of 14 days for one object pursued by four provenance researchers. My count is in work-years.
- 5 Höpfner (1973, 322); museologist Boris Gliemann (pers. comm. 20 January 2022) adds that the loss register of 2046 boxes returned from Celle and 3000 objects from Leipzig in 1956/1957 are not yet fully documented. In the museum's database, 119 objects are listed as war loots now stored in the *Eremitage* in St. Petersburg, Russia.
- 6 Curator Maurice Mengel's assumption is made on the highest "IC" inventory number (pers. comm. 5 January 2022). Thanks goes to museologist Henryk Ortlieb (pers. comm. 11 January 2022).
- 7 *Staatliche Museen zu Berlin* and the *Ethnologisches Museum. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ethnologisches Museum* (archive abbreviation: SMB-PK, EM); EM inv. no. 8186, but lost; SMB-PK, EM, I/MV 1101, E1941/80: Letter of Rosenberg of 17.8.1880; SMB-PK, EM HK SOA 18; EM inv. no. IC 10280, but lost; SMB-PK, I/MV 1101, EM E1377/81: Letter of H. Lüders of 2.5.1881. Full names and life data are unknown.
- 8 This is a rough estimate by *Deutsche Bundesbank* (Deutsche Bundesbank 2022).
- 9 Villegas (2004, 10); the reference was kindly provided by Victor Estrella (pers. comm. 6 December 2021).
- 10 SMB-PK, EM, I/MV 1100, E1162/73: Inventory of Dieduksman of 14 November 1871. The object's entries added to the lists are different (compare SMB-PK, EM HK SOA 15 and 18).
- 11 *Ethnologisches Museum* inv. no. IC 1617, formerly inv. no. 1941; Documented after the return from Celle, the blade was lost (SMB-PK, EM HK SOA 15). Five

- daggers in Indonesian and European museums are claimed to have belonged to Diponegoro of which one from the *Museum Volkenkunde* in the Netherlands was returned to Indonesia in 2020 (Beurden 2020, 199–200).
- 12 SMB-PK, EM, I/MV 1100, E129/73: Letter of Bastian of 23 January 1879.
 - 13 SMB-PK, EM, I/MV 1100, E8/82: Letter of Dieduksman of 12 November 1881.
 - 14 SMB-PK, EM/IB Asien Mikrofilm 190, E1272/01; Grünwedel mentioned two complete jewellery sets of Javanese dancers and “folkloristic Indian jewellery” (SMB-PK, EM, 345-7 I/IB Asien, E517/00: letter of Grünwedel of 12 October 1900).
 - 15 Thanks to restorers Birgit Kantzenbach and Eva Ritz.
 - 16 Letters of 27 August and 15 October 1899 (Natural History Museum London TMI/156/18 1899, 91, 93).
 - 17 SMB-PK, EM, 290-1 I/IB Asien, E1763/05: Letter of Richter 29 October 1905. The sculptures were partly damaged, soaked, covered by moss, and moat. Full names and life dates of Prillwitz’ family are unknown.
 - 18 SMB-PK, EM, 345-7 I/IB Asien, E1763/05: Letters of Richter of 29 September/13 October 1905.
 - 19 SMB-PK, EM, E1763/05 VIIIVisAnt 345, 356, 358.
 - 20 Brandes et al. 1909; Romondt 1951; 13 statues are found in the *Museum für Asiatische Kunst* today. As proposed by Lufti Mala Dings (pers. communication 15 July 2022), the Vishnu images date to the 9–11th century, respectively to the 14–15th century, the Surga to the 9–11th century, the spouts (*Museum für Asiatische Kunst* inv. no. II185, II186) are probably from Batu Gede site and the “ancestor figure” (*Museum für Asiatische Kunst* inv. no. II616) of the 14–15th century probably originates from Candi Besi Arjuna, the Makara (*Museum für Asiatische Kunst* inv. no. II212) might be from Jaladwara Singosari.
 - 21 SMB-PK, EM, 345-7 I/IB Asien E1763/05: List of artefacts of 29 January 1905. The bronzes include one exception from Aceh, North Sumatra.
 - 22 Museum Leiden inv. no. 1403-3298 from Surabaya; Tjoa-Bonatz and Lockhoff 2019, 30–33, fig. 4. The Frankfurt Museum bought 665 ethnographica and 224 gold objects for 60,000 marks, equivalent to about 324,000 € in January 2022 (*Weltkulturenmuseum* Frankfurt inv. nos. 19742, 19744, 19746).
 - 23 The silvery blades are exposed to the sun in order to conserve and highlight the texture. If rusty, they are soaked in lemon water (five small lemons to 1 l water), brushed, cleansed with water, and wiped with rice husk or dried in the sun. Persistent stains are brushed-off by applying arsenic. The whole procedure takes 30 min. Although oil consisting of benzoin and soaked in ethanol quickly vanishes, this liquid was applied by Prillwitz on the objects sent to Europe (SMB-PK, EM, 345-7 I/IB Asien E1763/05: List of artefacts of 29 January 1905).
 - 24 Prillwitz’ complaint about the museum’s bad packaging (SMB-PK, EM, 345-7 I/IB Asien E1763/05: Report of Richter of 29 September 1905; letter of Richter of 29 January 1906). Prillwitz also comments on matching objects for effective packaging (SMB-PK, EM, 345-7 I/IB Asien E1763/05: Letter of Prillwitz of 2 November 1905).
 - 25 SMB-PK, EM, 345-7 I/IB Asien E1763/05: Reports of Richter of 19/29 October 1905.
 - 26 SMB-PK, EM, 345-7 I/IB Asien, E1763/05: Letter of Richter of 17 January 1906; 345-7 I/IB Asien, E324/06: Permission of Bode of 16 February 1906.
 - 27 Several letters are judged as urgent (SMB-PK, EM, 290-1 I/IB Asien E1763/05: Letters of Richter 13/29 October 1905, Letter of Bode of 22 December 1905;

- Letter of the *Generalverwaltung der königlichen Museen* of 15 June 1906; 345-7 I/IB Asien, E1763/1905: Note of Müller of 14 October 1905 added to the report of Richter of 13 October 1905.
- 28 SMB-PK, EM, 345-7 I/IB Asien E1763/05: Letter of Richter of 31 October 1905.
 - 29 SMB-PK, EM, 345-7 I/IB Asien E1763/06: Letter of Prillwitz of 2 November 1905.
 - 30 This is recorded in the acquisition record of a kris from Bali (EM inv. no. IC 298a/b; SMB-PK, EM, I/MV 1107, E1989/50) “Be[s]chreibung” of 1851, obtained by the *Preussische Kunstkammer* in Berlin from Claas Rodenburg (1802–?), a German who was employed as civil servant from 1833 to 1859 on Java and Sumatra.
 - 31 Tjoa-Bonatz and Lockhoff (2019, 23) erroneously assumed that Glücksmann not Glucksmann [sic] was an antiquities dealer.
 - 32 He was married to Margareta Cohn, had three children between the ages of 8 and 14 years and was neither convicted nor “politically active” (SMB-PK, EM, 345-7 I/IB Asien, E324/1906: Letter of the police in Breslau of 25 June 1906).
 - 33 *Museum für Asiatische Kunst* inv. no. II 622, 623, 776–8; see the list of objects received by the museum of Richter n.d. (SMB-PK, EM, 345-7 I/IB Asien, E1763/05).
 - 34 Natural History Museum in London (TR/1/1/34/388–577); SMB-PK, EM, 345-7 I/IB Asien E594/13 and E225/26: Letter of Prillwitz of 3 April 1913.
 - 35 *Victoria and Albert Museum*, London inv. no. IS.13-2003: the bequest on behalf of the Estate of Margaretha Ernestine Maria Seth late of Cairns who got the earring as a gift from her late father was accepted due to the recommendation of curator John Guy as a rare, valuable and finely-worked object; I gave a wrong inventory number (Tjoa-Bonatz 2019, fig. 7).
 - 36 SMB-PK, EM, 290-1 I/IB Asien E1026/11: Offer of Merten to the expert commission of 8 June 1911.
 - 37 Philologist Arlo Griffiths (pers. comm. 20 December 2021) who is acknowledged suggests a different reading to scholar Ekowati Sundari (2009, 104–5, fig. 7.7; idenk.net no. 32–33 (accessed 20.12.2021)).
 - 38 I gave a wrong inventory number and dating (Tjoa-Bonatz 2019a, 46); Griffiths has kindly provided the reading of three characters on one ring: “SAGINA”, meaning “virtuous” (*Weltkulturenmuseum* Frankfurt inv. no. 19779). The second ring allows the tentative reading of two very faint characters “PRANA”, meaning “life” (*Weltkulturenmuseum* Frankfurt inv. no. 19778). His reading is based on the assumption that the text was the same as that on a ring kept at the *Tropenmuseum* Amsterdam, the Netherlands (inv. no. TM-2960-256) and another one formerly kept there but stolen in 1988 (inv. no. ex-3707-1).
 - 39 Anthropologist Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, art historian Lydia Kieven and former curator Wibke Lobo (letter of 1 October 2019).

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8 Challenging the Jacobsen Collections from the American Northwest Coast and Alaska

A Long *Durée* of Multilateral Engagement and Complex Relationships 1881–2021

Viola König

Introduction

The collections of the Norwegian brothers Adrian and Filip Jacobsen, housed in several German museums, have received an unusual amount of attention. For nearly 140 years, the thousands of objects collected on the Pacific Northwest Coast and in Alaska in the 1880s have inspired ongoing research and publications by international scholars, as well as reciprocal consultations by representatives of indigenous groups from the countries of origin.

The objects, which Adrian Jacobsen collected both in the coastal and the interior of the Alaskan subarctic are certainly not as spectacular as the impressive ceremonial objects from the Northwest Coast, but they are among the earliest known specimens ever from this region, and are becoming more and more important in view of the ongoing climate change that is particularly noticeable in the Arctic.

Adrian and Filip Jacobsen's collections are distributed among many renowned German anthropological museums, such as the museums in Hamburg, Leipzig Lübeck, Bremen, Köln, Freiburg, Frankfurt, but also outside Germany such as Oslo and Chicago. In this study, I will focus on the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin (EM/SMB), which stands out among all the others because of the mere size of its collections.

As Jacobsen collected objects from some 20 different indigenous groups, the representatives and their motivations for travelling from the northwest coast of Washington state, British Columbia, and Alaska to Germany to consult their ancestral heritage in the museums were quite diverse: Elders, Chiefs, artists, museum curators, university professors, film makers, and theatre directors.

Based on a chronology spanning 140 years, this article examines the background for building the Jacobsen Collection and the way it has been handled up to the present day. The objectives and, if applicable, the methods of the protagonists are analysed in their respective contemporary frameworks:

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1. What was collected and what was the purpose of this collection?
2. What role did commercial interests play?
3. What influence did aesthetic criteria have and who defined them?
4. What is the historical significance of the Jacobsen Collection?
5. “Visual repatriation”—Why is this collection so important?
6. According to which criteria was the Jacobsen Collection exhibited in Germany and the countries of origin?
All these questions lead to the perspectives of a future use of the Jacobsen Collection, its present relevance, reowning knowledge, and forms of exchange:
7. Consequences and challenges for the future treatment of the collection.

The Berlin Jacobsen Collection from the 19th Century and the Purpose of Its Creation

Johan Adrian Jacobsen (1853–1947, Figure 8.1) is among one of several contemporaries of Adolf Bastian (1826–1905), the founding director the *Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin* (Royal Museum of Ethnology), today *Ethnologisches Museum (EM/Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz)*, who contributed to the establishment of its huge collections at the end of the 19th century.

The new species “ethnological museum” had just been founded in Europe and North America, which caused a “scramble” for objects to an unprecedented extent (Cole 1985). Bastian’s Museum took a leading role in the development of anthropological collections, also at the international level, gaining the envy as well as criticism of contemporaries. The director succeeded in attracting excellent and capable personalities to work with him. However, it was not only academicians who contributed towards the tremendous increase of the holdings of the EM (König 2007, 134–136). One of Bastian’s suppliers was Johan Adrian Jacobsen, a mariner from Norway who collected no less than 11,000 objects.

Bastian had recognised in 1880, during his return voyage from Polynesia to Germany via North America, that the indigenous cultures of Northwest America, who had come into closer contact with Europeans only as late as the end of the 18th century, were already on the brink of extinction. Their complex social structure paired with a unique art style and perfection in carving moved Bastian to raise almost 25,000 marks to finance a collecting trip. He commissioned Jacobsen, who thereupon travelled along the Northwest Coast of America between 1881 and 1883. With a yield of 3000 objects from the Pacific Northwest Coast and 4000 objects from northern Alaska, Jacobsen compiled the museum’s largest single collection from North America.

It is apparent that Adrian Jacobsen was well aware of Bastian’s expectations for assembling an ideal ethnographic collection. Like him, Jacobsen recognised the aesthetic quality of contemporary art-making on the Northwest Coast, but also the high level of survival technology in northern Alaska.



Figure 8.1 Johan Adrian (1853–1947). © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum Berlin.

Commercial Interests in Collecting

Collectors and Businessmen—The Jacobsen Brothers

Adrian Jacobsen was born on 9 October 1853, on the island of Risö near Tromsö in Norway. He came from an ordinary fisherman's family and did

not receive any proper school education, but attended the school of navigation in Tromsø. In 1874, he travelled to Hamburg, where his brother owned a business. Soon thereafter, Jacobsen undertook his first long voyage to Valparaíso, Chile. Upon returning to Hamburg in 1877, he acquired an ethnographic collection from Greenland for Carl Hagenbeck.

In 1878, Jacobsen travelled to Berlin with this collection. He was accompanied by indigenous Laplanders and three individuals from Patagonia. Adrian Jacobsen was already a proven businessman by this time, though he had not always been successful. The following tour, one of the then popular “Völkerschauen” (ethnic shows), included eight Lab

rador Inuit. It ended in a disaster. Not being vaccinated, the Inuit died one by one from smallpox. Shocked by this experience, Hagenbeck and Jacobsen stopped all further travel with “exotic,” indigenous peoples for a while (Haberland 1987, 33). Bastian’s offer, therefore, came at the right moment.

Departing from San Francisco, Jacobsen travelled along the entire Canadian Northwest Coast and Alaska (Figure 8.2). Among others, he purchased objects from the Kwakwaka’wakw (formerly named Kwakiutl), Haida and Tlingit. He acquired even more items from the Yup’ik, Iñupiat, and others in the far North of Alaska.

Stays at places on his journeys could last 1 hour or several weeks. Most objects were purchased from local artists, or from middlemen and local dealers. These objects were soon viewed as representative, even unique, so that critical voices arose in the United States and Canada against this “selling off” to a European (Cole 1985, 37). Adrian Jacobsen, for his part, complained about competition with other travellers in search of curios, and even with indigenous people, who still made the items for their own use:

Unfortunately, a scientific collector must take these circumstances into account and console himself with the fact that in the future the objects will become much more expensive

(Jacobsen 1884, 2)

Even in the far North, Adrian Jacobsen encountered a competitor, the naturalist Edward Nelson, who had travelled on behalf of the Smithsonian Institution immediately before Jacobsen (1877–1881).

After his collecting trips for Berlin, Jacobsen continued travelling to North America, to Siberia, East Asia (1884–1885), and to Indonesia (1887–1888). Later, he returned to Carl Hagenbeck and the “Völkerschauen.” Adrian Jacobsen died on 18 January 1947.

The businessman and self-made ethnologist Adrian Jacobsen wrote quite a few articles about his trips, but the greatest and most sustained attention was given to a work published in 1884 in cooperation with the journalist A. Woldt. He transferred Jacobsen’s records, such as field diaries and notes, into an easy-to-read monograph titled “Capitain Jacobsen’s Reise an der Nordwestküste Amerikas, 1881–1883, zum Zwecke ethnologischer

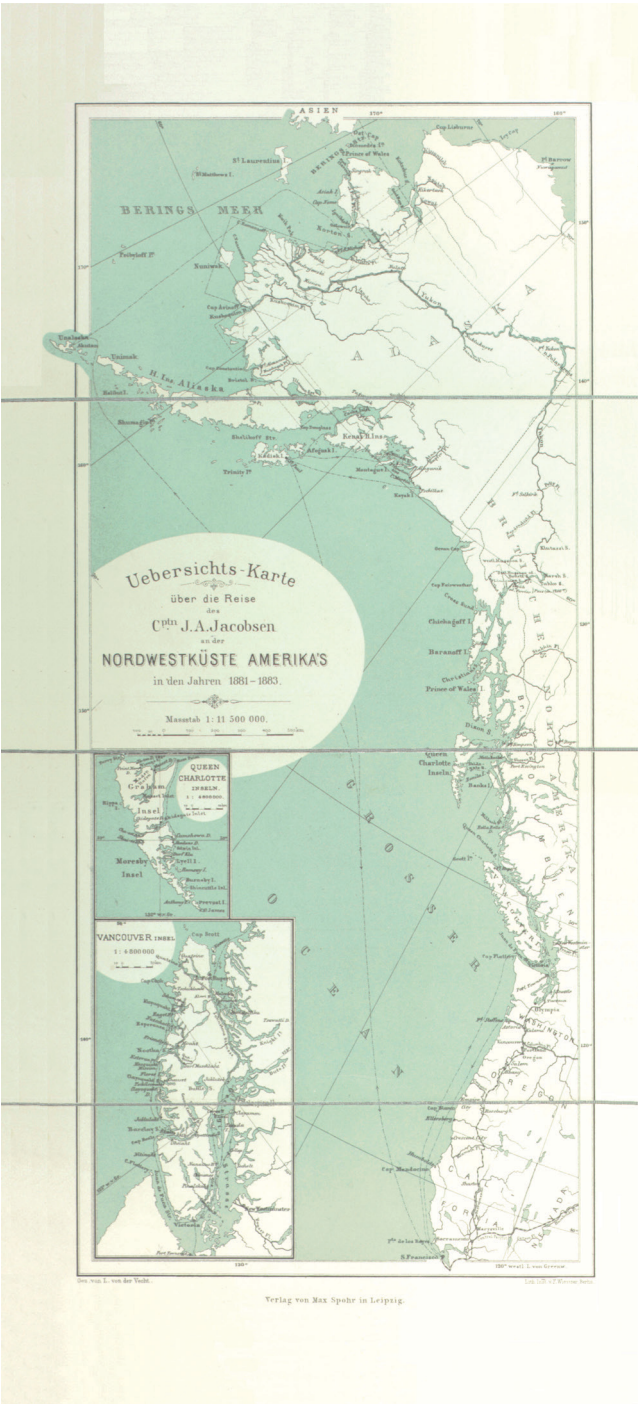


Figure 8.2 Map of Jacobsen’s “Trip to the Northwest Coast of America in the Years 1881–1883” included in his publication 1884. © No copy-right required.

Sammlungen und Erkundigungen, nebst Beschreibung persönlicher Erlebnisse, für den deutschen Leserkreis bearbeitet von A. Woldt” (Jacobsen 1884; Gunther 1977; König 2013a). At the same time, Adolf Bastian published an illustrated catalogue on the American North West Coast (Bastian 1884).

Adrian’s younger brother, Bernhard Filip Jacobsen (1864–1935), followed him from Norway to Germany in 1883 where he was employed by Carl Hagenbeck in Hamburg (Gerhard 1991, 97). Later, he helped to arrange Adrian’s so-called first collection, which had been moved to the museum in Berlin. In the spring of 1884, Filip Jacobsen set-out on his first collecting trip to British Columbia. He visited the Kwakwaka’wakw, Heiltsuk (formerly named Bella Bella) and Nuxalk (formerly named Bella Coola). During his winter stay at Port Essington, he was able to extend his collection with Tsimshian and Tlingit objects. He reached the Tongass in Alaska and then returned to Bella Coola (Gerhard 1991, 45). In July 1885, he met with his brother Adrian Jacobsen to start another business. Nine Nuxalk men agreed to sign a contract to perform for a year in Germany in a “Völkerschau” financed by Hagenbeck (Figure 8.3).

After completing the engagement in 1886, Filip Jacobsen accompanied the group back to British Columbia where he continued to work as an independent collector until he died in Bella Coola in 1935. He sold a collection to Karl von den Steinen for the Berlin EM and published a few travel reports, descriptions of indigenous dances, and legends. In 1892, Filip collected for



Figure 8.3 The participants of the Nuxalk (Bella Coola) troupe 1884/85 at Berlin. © Photo by Carl Günther.

Franz Boas (1858–1942), whom he had met before in Berlin. Boas was commissioned by the Department of Ethnology at Harvard University's Peabody Museum to assemble a collection for the 1893 Chicago World's Fair (Cole 1985, 122). Fifteen objects of the collection, which Boas sold to the EM in 1887, had been purchased from Filip Jacobsen.

Academic Profiteers and Indigenous "Service Providers"

Adrian and Filip Jacobsen's collections, records, and publications served international scholars and members of indigenous communities as an important source. The aforementioned Franz Boas studied the Jacobsen Collection from the Northwest Coast as early as 1885, and for all his harsh criticism, Bastian's young assistant Boas was its first beneficiary. He complained about Jacobsen's poor descriptions, especially the lack of information on provenance (Bolz and Sanner, 1999, 183). Nevertheless, Boas was so strongly stimulated by the Jacobsen materials that he made use of the collection for his own studies and located a regional focus of his own research on the Northwest Coast. By hiring Jacobsen's translator George Hunt, Boas was able to make a direct comparison with Jacobsen's account on the Kwakwaka'wakw. Hunt was paid for his services.

Like his Berlin colleagues, Franz Boas took the opportunity to work with the nine Nuxalk during their stay in Berlin in January and March 1886. While Rudolf Virchow took physical measurements of the participants, Carl Stumpf made his first song recording, spending four sessions with the singer Nuskilusta.¹ Boas, for his part, spent weeks among the Nuxalk researching intensively, which enabled him to publish about their language and music (Cole 1982, 117; for Boas see 1886a, 1886b). By this time, the scientific interest of Franz Boas in the belief systems of the Northwest Coast was sustainably aroused.

Nothing is known about the conditions under which these German academics were able to conduct their investigations: Were fees paid, as was the practice for all other Nuxalk activities done outside of the contractual appearances? For instance, the Nuxalk made new objects in their spare time in Germany, which they used in their shows and then sold.²

One can conclude that the Jacobsen brothers were first and foremost businessmen. They by no means pursued only scientific interests in building their extensive collections; collecting was a commercial venture for them from the very beginning. In addition, their various commercial activities served as a goldmine for renowned scholars. However, working with indigenous partners, including paid informants, also opened up new sources of income for them.

"Upgrading" to an Art Collection

Until the beginning of World War II, parts of the Jacobsen Collection were on display in the old Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin, where they attracted the

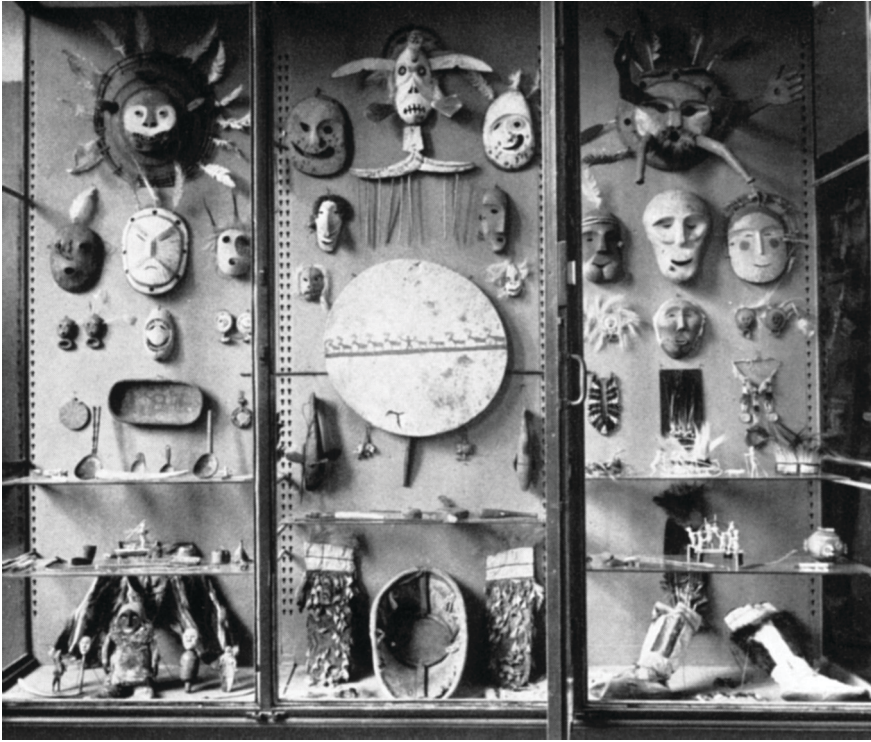


Figure 8.4 Exhibition showcase with parts of the Jacobsen collection in the old Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin around 1926. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum/800240.

interest of Surrealist artists. From the 1930s onwards, they acquired works and stimulated artistic production on the Northwest Coast. Franz Boas had already become interested in identifying individual artists and published first art studies on the Northwest Coast (Boas 1955). From then on, the Jacobsen Collection was of interest not only to ethnographic research, but also to the contemporary art world. However, large parts that were considered war losses were not accessible between 1945 and 1991 (Figure 8.4).

During this time, the extraordinary art exhibition “Donnervogel und Raubwal” (“Thunderbird and Killer Whale”) was opened in the Hamburg Museum of Ethnology (today Museum am Rothenbaum Kulturen und Künste der Welt MARKK) on the occasion of its 100th anniversary in May 1979. The curator and vice-director Wolfgang Haberland (1922–2015) published a catalogue which he dedicated to the work of “men of the first hour,” including Adrian Jacobsen and Franz Boas.³ At least 33 objects of the Berlin Jacobsen Collection were exhibited. The event was preceded

by a preparation that was innovative and unusual for that time in several respects. Haberland travelled to the Northwest Coast, bought works on site by then unknown young artists. More than that, he systematically contacted the descendants of the groups from whom the Jacobsen brothers had purchased their vast collections since the 1880s. A particularly intensive contact was established with the Hunt family, Jacobsen's and Boas' early "service providers" mentioned above, as well as the descendants of the nine Nuxalk who had toured Germany in the "Völkerschau" 1885 to 1886. Haberland invited a group of Kwakwaka'wakw to Hamburg, including master carver Calvin Hunt (born 1956), who danced at the opening ceremony in the thunderbird costume he had made as a gift for the museum. A group of seven Nuxalk, including descendants of group leader Tom Henry, also came to Hamburg to see the exhibition of their ancestors' works (König 2021, 22–24). The exhibition "Donnervogel und Raubwal" remained present on the Northwest Coast in the memory of those artists who were promoted by Haberland and later became internationally known. The catalogue, although published only in a limited edition in German, was a standard work for Northwest Coast artists in the decades to come. In a way, the Jacobsen Collections became known to Northwest Coast artists through Haberland's richly illustrated book.⁴

Since the Jacobsen brothers' collecting trips, market supply and demand have determined artistic production on the Northwest Coast to this day. But beyond commercial sales, new works are integrated into the ceremonial life of the clans. In Germany, Northwest Coast art has been introduced to a wider audience since the 1970s.

Historical Significance of the Jacobsen Collection

Beginning in the 1980s, the Jacobsen Collection became the focus of North American historians. Douglas Cole's comprehensive study, "Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts," is a standard work to this day (Cole 1985). On Jacobsen, Glenn Penny summarised:

The indigenous people Jacobsen and others encountered in their 'scramble for artifacts' were anything but victims or dupes: they understood the value of their possessions as well or better than collectors such as Jacobsen. ... Jacobsen collected skulls as well as objects, and he went into burial sites when he knew it was not allowed. That is not how he collected the vast majority of the objects he brought back to Berlin. ... That emphasis, Cole reminded us over two decades ago, 'creates its own deceptive fictions'.⁵

Shortly after Cole's archival studies in Germany, Hilke Thode-Arora investigated "Hagenbeck's Völkerschauen" and combed through Jacobsen's extensive legacy of manuscripts. She compiled a complete bibliography of his publications—38 articles in scientific and popular science magazines between

1888 and 1893 alone—which prove how much Jacobsen dreamed of a career as a curator (Thode-Arora 1989, 198–200).

Since the 1950s, there were rumours that visitors had seen Jacobsen objects in the Kunstkamera in Leningrad—today’s St. Petersburg. In the 1980s, it was finally confirmed that a large collection of Russian war booty from Leningrad had been transferred to the Grassi Museum at Leipzig in the former German Democratic Republic in 1978. Immediately after the reunification of the two German states, in 1990, the final repatriation of a total of 44,561 objects from Leipzig to Berlin was agreed (Höpfner 1993, 168–169). The reinventorying 1991–1993 brought to light many of the sorely missed “highlights” of the Jacobsen Collection (Bolz and Sanner 1999, 47–49).

This historical re-examination of the era of mass collecting in North America, and the sifting of archives in Germany, as well as the return of Russian war booty to Berlin placed the Jacobsen Collection in a global historical context (Penny 2002, 2021).

“Visual Repatriation”—The Yup’ik of Alaska Explore the Jacobsen Collection

Among the lost highlights were, in particular, masks of the Yup’ik, an indigenous group in Alaska. Until their return to Berlin, they were known only from illustrations in publications. In 1994, one year after the last box had been opened, the American anthropologist and Yup’ik specialist Ann Fienup-Riordan visited Berlin in order to prepare an exhibition on Yup’ik Masks (Fienup-Riordan 2005, xviii). She met a museum team fully engaged in unpacking and arranging the boxes, including the Yup’ik masks, some in poor condition.

As a result of her visit, 22 masks returned to Alaska, for the first time in 113 years, for a few weeks in 1996 and were on display at the exhibit “The Living Tradition of Yup’ik Masks: Agayuliyararput: Our Way of Making Prayer” (Fienup-Riordan 1996).

But this loan was only the beginning of a further exchange:

Drawing upon her excellent contacts with Yup’ik communities and institutions, Fienup-Riordan simultaneously started planning a return visit to Berlin that would include a team of Native experts. And so it happened that one year later, in September 1997, a research team of six Yup’ik men and women guided by Ann Fienup-Riordan arrived in Dahlem in order to study the Jacobsen Collection for three weeks extraordinary relationship
(Sanner 2007, 286)

In 1997, 120 years after Adrian Jacobsen first hired young Inuit from the far north for the Hamburg Zoo director Carl Hagenbeck in 1877, Elders of a group he had visited later, the Yup’ik, took such a trip to Berlin on their own initiative. Some were over 80 years old, with excellent language skills and knowledge of their traditional culture (Figure 8.5).

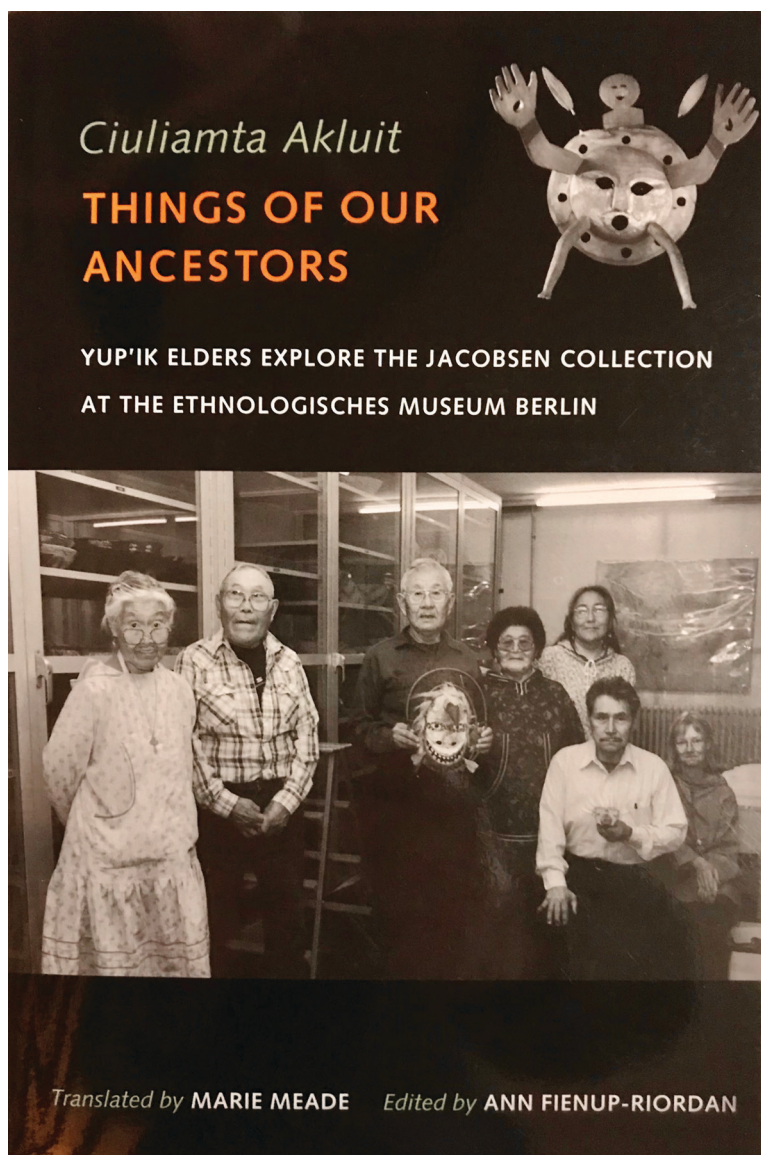


Figure 8.5 The Yup'ik delegation at Berlin 1997. Book cover: © Ciuliamta Akluit (2005). *Things of Our Ancestors: Yup'ik Elders Explore the Jacobsen Collection at the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin.*

They wanted to see the 2000 objects of the Jacobsen's Yup'ik collection on site and make a selection to incorporate them into their own exhibition. Fienup-Riordan's detailed publications on the project includes the most comprehensive biography of Johan Adrian Jacobsen so far, because in her words:

Without a clear understanding of who Jacobsen was and why and how he came to Alaska, the full significance of the collection he amassed and the unintended consequences of his collecting remain obscure. Working to collect the remnants of peoples thought to be on the edge of extinction, Jacobsen likely never imagined what a gift the objects he collected would be to the descendants of their makers. (...). And yet, their primary concern was not to reclaim museum objects, but to re-own the knowledge and experiences that the objects embodied

(Fienup-Riordan and Marie Meade, 2005, xiii, xxiii)

The visit was a tremendous mutual enrichment not only for the Yup'ik, but also for the museum curators. Jacobsen's notes and card information were complemented and corrected while the handling of the objects inspired the Elders to tell old stories and even perform music and dances (Santer 2007, 289). Unfortunately, not all "Elders" survived to see their travelling exhibition. Ten years after their visit in Berlin, "Yuungnaqpiallerput / The Way We Genuinely Live: Masterworks of Yup'ik Science and Survival" was finally ready to tour through Alaska, starting in 2007 in the Yup'ik community of Bethel, ending in Washington, DC in 2010 (Fienup-Riordan, Freda and Readen 2007, Figure 8.6).

The borrowing US institutions covered the costs including the restorative care for the fragile objects. The courier trips to Alaska allowed the establishment of new contacts with other indigenous groups represented in the Jacobsen Collection.

To summarise: Ann Fienup Riordan's initiative to bring a delegation of Yup'ik Elders to Berlin had pilot character. This special "field work turned on its head" opened up new perspectives for joint collaboration with the museum. It resulted, among other things, in a 5-year loan of Berlin objects for exhibitions in Alaska and its publication. This first sharing of knowledge project inspired further cooperation with other groups visited by Jacobsen.

Exhibiting the Jacobsen Collection

The presentation of the Jacobsen Collection follows different premises in its home countries than in Germany. There, it is a matter of preserving cultural heritage and knowledge; here, it is a matter of conveying and translating it for an external audience.

The results of the Yup'ik visit were incorporated into the new permanent exhibition "North America" in the Ethnological Museum at Dahlem in 1999,



Figure 8.6 The Jacobsen Collection on Tour in Alaska. Setting up the exhibition at the Alaska State Museum in Juneau, April 2009. © Viola König.

which followed the former concept of “cultural areas.” Ten years later, as part of a special exhibition on the Museum Island Berlin in 2009, the Yup’ik project was presented as an example of the strategies for future cooperation with the so-called “source communities” that were to be integrated into the new exhibition concept of the Humboldt Forum.⁶

The planning for the Humboldt Forum enabled the museum to generate funds for further collaborative projects. Between 2009 and 2017, three very different projects were conducted with partners from the Northwest Coast and Alaska.

The Project “One History—Two Perspectives” (2009–2012)

In 2009, the Ethnological Museum and the John F. Kennedy Institute of Freie Universität Berlin were granted a 3-year project from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) titled “One History—Two Perspectives: Culturally specific modes of representation of the ›exotic‹ other at the Pacific Northwest Coast.” The funding allowed the team to visit museums in Europe, Canada, and the USA and establish new networks.⁷ Most importantly, however, was the invitation of representatives from indigenous groups of the Northwest Coast to Berlin.

The project’s task was to rethink contemporary exhibition practices, and to develop alternatives for new modes of presentation with the active

involvement of indigenous partners. In addition, however, the scientific processing and digitisation of the collection was aimed at. The published results reflect the commentaries by the artists who had studied the objects in the Ethnological Museum. Dempsey Bob and Nathan Jackson, who had worked with Wolfgang Haberland (head of the Department of the Americas Hamburg) in the 1970s, had now come with their nephews and sons, all also artists (König 2011; Etges et al. 2014, 7). However, it turned out that they were not so much interested in the presentation in Berlin, but rather in the accessibility of the collections. The loan of objects was seen as the best way to collaborate effectively with the museum. Furthermore, the artists were particularly interested in the presentation and sale of their own works in German museums. Artist Dempsey Bob summarised:

I believe it is a great idea to integrate artists in the process of choosing and exposing the objects in Humboldt-Forum, given that they have a different perspective

(König 2014, 18–24)

Alternatives: The Use of Performance and Media in Exhibitions

Is it possible to bring the collection closer to the public with media other than showcases and exhibition texts? The “Humboldt Lab Dahlem” (2012–2015), serving as an “experimental rehearsal stage” in preparation for the exhibitions in the future Humboldt Forum, allowed the testing of this question.⁸ At that time, the exhibition planning called for two areas to explain Jacobsen’s journey. The first part aimed to retell the Jacobsen’s stay on the Northwest Coast from the perspective of the European adventurer and collector himself and illustrate it by means of the objects at various stops. The other part was to focus on the second part of the journey into the harsh, cold north of Alaska, but here from the present-day perspective of the Yup’ik and Iñupiat of the 21st century. Could new media translate 19th-century narrative material into other genres as an independent, artistic achievement? A puppet show, an interactive computer game and a virtual discovery tour were developed in 2014 to test new approaches. The puppet show “Travelogue,” produced live and as a video by the Puppet Theatre “Das Helmi,” caricatured the figure of Jacobsen using foam puppets as a problematic, tragicomic personality. The project was received controversially because indigenous protagonists were portrayed through Jacobsen’s eyes exactly as in his diary. The artist group “gold extra” employed two different narrative forms with which they addressed the origin of the collection and Jacobsen’s role in it. In their computer adventure game, visitors slipped into the role of Jacobsen during his stay with the Haida in Canada. Probably the most useful format turned out to be the use of tablets, with the help of which the objects themselves became storytellers (König and Zessnik 2014; König, Rostasy and Zessnik 2014, Figure 8.7).



Figure 8.7 “Totem’s Sound—Tablet Tour” created for the Humboldt Lab Dahlem as part of the “Travelogue” project at the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin in 2015. © goldextra.com.

“Thin Ice”: Facing the Environment and Climate Change in Ethnological Museums

The Humboldt Lab Dahlem also addressed the importance of the topic of climate change in exhibitions. Paul Ongtooguk, Iñupiat, professor for Research of Alaska Native Education, was invited to give a lecture in a workshop entitled “Sharing Knowledge. The Arctic Habitat” (October, 2015) and used this opportunity to study the 4000 objects collected by Adrian Jacobsen from his ancestors. Like the Yup’ik Elders before, Paul was able to demonstrate the function of all items live in the storage room, exactly as we had already seen him do in the exhibitions of the Anchorage Museum (Figure 8.8).

Dena’inaq’ Huch’ulyeshi: The Dena’ina Way of Living

At the same time, the Anchorage Museum was preparing a large exhibition in close collaboration with another Alaskan group, the Dena’ina.⁹ Once again, the Ethnological Museum was asked for a loan. Twenty-eight objects from the Jacobsen Collection temporarily returned to Anchorage in 2013 to be exhibited. Among the numerous international lenders, only the Kunstkamera Museum of St. Petersburg and the Berlin Jacobsen Collection in the Ethnological Museum were given their own chapter in the exhibition catalogue. In this catalogue all 55 Dena’ina objects were published, because



Figure 8.8 Inupiat Professor Paul Ongtooguk studies the collection of his ancestors on the occasion of the Workshop “Thin Ice” in the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, October 2015. © Viola König.

“this museum holds the largest and most diverse collection of nineteenth-century Dena’ina objects not associated with Russian America. Within the Jacobsen Collection of Dena’ina artifacts are several one-of-a-kind objects, including a beluga spear and two heddles used for weaving quills or bead.” (Jones et al. 2013, 285; König 2013b, 261–271).

Present Relevance, Reowning Knowledge, Forms of Exchange

Provenance Research and the Significance of Jacobsen’s Written Legacy

From the rather incidental contribution of the Nuxalk to German scientists during their stay in Berlin in 1886, Wolfgang Haberland’s trip to their community Bella Coola, B.C. in 1978, and the Yup’ik initiative “Fieldwork turned on its head” in Berlin in 1997, ongoing collaborative research has continuously developed. However, given the size of the Jacobsen Collection, it is not surprising that there are unresolved questions about the provenance of individual objects. Yet, there is a danger that researchers who focus exclusively on provenance may miss important clues to other aspects that are significant. For example, the case of the “Tsimshian Pole”: Why did indigenous carvers make inauthentic totem poles for sale to Europeans like Filip Jacobsen? Understanding the “complex histories” hidden in the Jacobsen Collections requires knowledge preserved in the societies of origin combined with an examination of the objects and written documents archived in

German institutions. Furthermore, provenance research must also reconstruct and map the “webs of interactions,” identify the contact persons involved, such as indigenous middlemen and German compatriots, who made extensive collecting possible in the first place (Labischinski 2021; König 2022, 262–274).

Items collected by Adrian Jacobsen in the Eyak area of Alaska’s Prince William Sound can be stylistically assigned by ethnologists to the Tlingit of the Southeast, while linguists can use Jacobsen’s records to trace the language shift from Eyak to Tlinkit in the late 19th century and back to Eyak in the 20th. Therefore, North American scholars not only recognise the value of the Jacobsen Collections but also Adrian’s records, even if they are hard to read and flawed:

His journals however, written in a sort of German heavily influenced by and mixed with Dano-Norwegian and English, are of significant interest for language also. For instance, of Eyak village he writes, inimitably: ‘in Iggiak Villag, zwischen das Kopfer River und Prinz William Sound am ein Lake beliid – sprechen ein eigne Sprache sollen von ein Inlands treib sein – sind jetzt mit Eskimo und auch Thlinket intermarried und die meisten verstehen die beide Sprachen’.

(Krauss 2006, 191)

For all the caution exercised in dealing with Jacobsen’s texts, and “although somewhat amateurish, these reports represent a transition in genre between travel accounts and professional ethnography, and are valuable for informing our understanding of early Northwest Coast anthropology” (Glass 2010, 1). In fact, Jacobsen’s descriptions are often the earliest accounts for many customs, for instance: the Hamatsa dance of the Kwakwaka’wakw (Jacknis 2002, 21; Glass 2021, 98, Figure 8.9).

Specialist Fienup Riordan even observes a kind of method of collecting in the Far North:

We are fortunate that Jacobsen concentrated his efforts ‘from the first to last snowflake’, when people had gathered into winter villages, rather than scattered over the landscape in hundreds of small seasonal camps. Jacobsen was also lucky in the northern group’s attitude towards the objects he desired. Jacobsen was able to buy extraordinary masks and ceremonial paraphernalia, not because they no longer had meaning but because of the requirement that these spiritually charged pieces be discarded after use and newly made every year.

(Fienup Riordan 2005, 33)

Jacobsen’s diaries also led to the location of sites and eventual restitution. In 2002, US archaeologist Janet Klein studied 200 objects from the Kenai peninsula, Alaska at the Ethnological Museum.¹⁰ She had read that Jacobsen



Figure 8.9 Left: “Crooked Beak Mask”. Kwakwaka’wakw, Nouette, Hope Island, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, before 1881, not for sale, IV A 893 a, b. Right: “Boatsmask Pogtettnoak—the one who travels with big boat” with helping spirit (tuunraq). Yup’ik, Kuskokwim, Alaska. Collection of Johan Adrian Jacobsen, before 1883; the objects were traditionally destroyed after being used, IV A 5145. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum/Photo: Dietrich Graf, IV A 893, IV A 5145.

“dug at a Native village called Soonroodna,” a still-unidentified site in Prince William Sound, homeland of the Sugpiaq or Alutiq.¹¹ In her book, Klein published a selection of the objects, including five items that were restituted to the Chugach Corporation 10 years later.¹²

In 2012, Medeia Csoba DeHass of the Department of Anthropology and Alaska Native Studies at the University of Alaska in Anchorage travelled to Berlin in order to register the Jacobsen Collection for her “Sugpiaq Ethnohistory collaborative, community-based project with the Nanwalek Indian Reorganization Act Council and the community of Nanwalek, Alaska.”¹³ The website:

provides a platform for virtual repatriation where community members can engage with museum collections located at different parts of the world ... people can actively reconnect with items that were once removed from their communities and their cultural realities. Community members can learn about the past histories of these items and reintegrate these pieces

into their collective knowledge on what is important to know about Sugpiaq past in the region.¹⁴

Here, all Jacobsen Sugpiaq objects can be consulted online.

The Restitution to the Chugach Alaska Corporation

Around the same time, the project “Being Aware of Our Beginnings,” was launched with the aim of exploring Chugach artefacts in museums all over the world to “create a complete digital archive of Chugach material culture worldwide.”¹⁵ In May 2013, the Chugach Alaska Corporation contacted the Ethnological Museum and announced the visit of a delegation to view the pieces from the Kenai Peninsula and start a cooperation “for a virtual exhibit on our website and eventually a loan for an exhibition of the objects.”¹⁶ The five-member delegation that visited the museum in November 2015 included Helen Morris and John Johnson, who had been responsible for the repatriation of human remains throughout the USA beginning in the 1990s under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). So Johnson was interested in finding human remains in the Jacobsen Collection. Although the museum documentation does mention four mummies from Chenega, these have not been inventoried and could not be traced (Labischinski 2018, 13). Unlike Janet Klein and Medeia Csoba DeHass, Johnson had no idea about the objects Jacobsen had marked as coming from graves. However, after I had shown him the relevant passages in Jacobsen’s diary and the associated burial objects in the storage, he asked for restitution.¹⁷ His request was recognised not only by the museum but also by the legal owner, the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation). The bureaucratic process took only 24 months until its final approval in November 2017, followed by the physical restitution ceremony in the Ethnological Museum Berlin in May 2018 (Figure 8.10).¹⁸

Exactly two years after the first Chugach delegation, another one visited German institutions in November 2019 to identify Chugach artefacts (Labischinski 2020). Meanwhile, sharing collections and the knowledge inherent in them has become a common practice.

However, the restitution did not go unchallenged. It was criticised that its formal justification by the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz contained factual errors based primarily on Eurocentric legal norms that did not apply at the time of Jacobsen’s stay in Alaska. Another objection is not at all comprehensible to the Chugach Corporation, namely that Jacobsen did not steal the burial objects from the current residents at all, because it was allegedly common practice among whale hunters of the neighbouring island of Kodiak to steal and move mummies from secret caves (Schlothauer 2018, 19–22). But the Chugach Corporation sees an all-encompassing responsibility for its territory:



Figure 8.10 John Johnson of the Chugach Corporation studying the collection of his ancestors and their neighbours on the occasion of the restitution of nine objects in the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, May 2018. © Viola König.

How were traditional values and worldview expressed through objects produced within the culture? ... What connections can the people of the region make between the traditional knowledge exhibited and their worldview? These questions are particularly relevant in the context of the Alutiiq culture that has already undergone massive changes since the objects were produced and a region where people are striving to regain a culture they fear has been lost.¹⁹

The return of objects from ethnological collections is no longer a matter of proving a “context of injustice” that must be legally comprehensible from a European perspective. Nor is there a direct “colonial context” in the case of North American collections in German museums, and who should define “ethical commitments”? Rather, restitution reflects the current significance to the descendants and their expressed desire to take care of their significant objects themselves, whether as memorabilia, for ceremonial practice or just as cultural heritage.

Meanwhile in the USA, indigenous owners of the restituted objects agreed to the production of faithful 3D replicas for practical use in change for the physical retention of the objects in the museum, where they can be professionally cared for in terms of conservation, even if they no longer legally belong to the museum.

Interchange and Gifts

In 1997, the Yup'ik Elders had already pointed out the aspect of seeing the Jacobsen Collection as a gift. Recent collaborations have opened up even more opportunities for reconciliation than simply physical restitutions. In June 2015, I was invited to present the Ethnological Museum's collection from Kodiak on the international symposium “The turning circle” held in Boulogne-sur-Mer and Paris. Kodiak artists and representatives from various Native Alaskan organisations were present, as well as specialists from North America and Europe.²⁰ The Musée Boulogne-sur-Mer organised it on the occasion of an extraordinary project. In 2008, 36 of 60 masks that the collector Alphonse Pinart had collected in the Kodiak Archipelago between 1871 and 1871 were lent to Kodiak for 9 months. In return, the museum received contemporary works of art from Kodiak artists as gifts. This was apparently a good deal for the museum, who could present the “returned” old and the new works together now. The artists, on the other hand, saw this action as an excellent opportunity to promote their art permanently in Europe.

The *longue-durée* of dealing with the Jacobsen Collection has shown that the societies of origin were involved in different ways from the very beginning. The methodological approaches were project-dependent. A particular challenge lies in the generational change. How can we jointly succeed in keeping the regained knowledge of five generations of those involved accessible in the long term, and expand it in a targeted manner?

Consequences and Challenges for the Future Treatment of the Collection

Current developments underscore the importance of the Jacobsen Collection in its home countries. But what is the function of the collection in a German museum today? Both aspects are addressed in the concluding remarks.

The Jacobsen Collection from Alaska and Climate Change

Since time immemorial, the inhabitants of North and Northwest Alaska have experienced long and extreme cold winters. But for many years, Alaska has been one of the regions experiencing the most dramatic effects of climate change. Among the discussions on the Musée Boulogne-sur-Mer conference, I remember Othniel Art Oomittuk Jr.'s commentary on the importance of the Jacobsen Collection as a testament to indigenous culture before the dramatic climate change in the far north. He is an Inupiat artist from Point Hope in the Chukchi Sea. Since he described the situation in drastic terms in 2015, the situation has even worsened:

Climate change is already here for us. The ice has changed. It comes late, it leaves early. It has become unreliable, hard to read, making it dangerous to cross during hunting. Our ice cellars are melting, eroding, making it difficult to store our subsistence food. It rained this past winter; it never rains in the winter. The ice in the fall used to protect our coastline from heavy waves. Now the waves wash away our shores.

(Othniel Art Oomittuk Jr. 2015)

When Jacobsen came to Alaska, he encountered cultures that had not previously been of interest to explorers and collectors due to the extreme climatic conditions of -40° and the hazardous travel conditions. Jacobsen's treatment of indigenous people reflects the racist attitudes of his time. Astonished by the resistance to sell their property or to give accommodation and provision to this authoritarian, sometimes even violent Norwegian sailor, he used their huts without being asked, plundered graves and did not appear squeamish in other ways either. Nevertheless, his collections, his descriptions and illustrations of the objects as well as his recordings of the indigenous languages are contemporary witnesses to climate change today. In Jacobsen's time, seasonal fishing techniques, preparation and preservation methods for animal and vegetable food followed the rules of the arctic and subarctic. But how much longer will there be Yup'ik and Iñupiat who know how to use the items?

Charles Edensu's Totem Pole from the Northwest Coast and What It Says About Us

On May 5, 2021, the Haida Totem Pole purchased by Adrian Jacobsen on Haida Gwa'ii in 1881 was erected in the Humboldt Forum Berlin. A joint ceremony with Jim Hurt, a descendant of carver Charles Edensu, was planned back in 2016. However, Haida representatives were only able to virtually attend due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Northwest coast specialist Aaron Glass believes this "intercultural icon" is perfect for use inside the Humboldt Forum to address misconceptions about totem poles which

are rather complicated products of Native encounter with and reaction to European presence. Poles are visual means of advertising clan identity and celebrating individual ancestors, but the museum knows much more about the Haida-Edensu pole in the collection than is the case for most late 19th century poles and can add a more detailed explication of its specific local significance. Ongoing contact with master carver Jim Hart, current holder of the title Chief Edensu, means that these important museum artefacts are also a living heritage in the present.

"The totem pole" has come to be iconic for Native Americans in general within the global imaginary, and with a very specific German pedigree through popular writers such as Karl May and others. In the 1880s, the notion of "totemism" was of keen concern to theorists interested in the origins of religion as a model for their evolutionist models. So-called totem poles began to be sought after at this time by European museums and it was precisely in these intellectual and cultural/colonial milieus that Jacobsen acquired the Haida pole, which is probably the first full-sized pole to enter a European museum collection, making it highly significant in the history of museums. Therefore, the fascinating story of its post-Indigenous provenance can serve to introduce visitors to the museum itself and its own history.²¹

Implications and Final Remarks

Glass's characterisation as "intricate products of Native people's encounter with and response to the European presence in the region" applies to many of the Jacobsen objects. But the questions posed to the collection are subject to a "Zeitgeist." The founding director of the "Völkerkundemuseum" in Berlin Adolf Bastian collected in the spirit of a "salvage anthropology," in order to save and preserve evidence that testified to the original cultural heritage of indigenous groups. He assumed their inevitable extinction as a necessary consequence of the ever-expanding Western influence. However, the indigenous populations of the Northwest Coast and Alaska are not extinct, and despite intermittent bans on practice, traditions have been revived. Instead, 100 years later, "the Elders who travelled to Berlin were the recognised 'professors' from their region and were chosen for their ability and willingness to share what they knew." They specifically wanted their stories about the objects to be recorded not only for their own community but also for the museum and "for anyone else who is interested not only in what the Elders have to say, but how they say it." (Fienup-Riordan and Meade 2005, xxiii–xxiv).

Neither Bastian and Jacobsen in the late 1880s, nor the Yup'ik Elders in the late 1990s, however, could have foreseen that their natural habitat in the far north with extremely low temperatures, to which they had adapted their culture so perfectly, is being destroyed with as yet unforeseeable consequences for their future life. Nowadays, the Jacobsen Collection testifies to far more than vanished cultures, it is an exemplary witness to the existence of ecological habitats that are unlikely to exist in this form in the foreseeable

future. All this suggests that the potential of the Jacobsen Collection is far from exhausted.

Notes

- 1 Photographs and recordings preserved in the EM.
- 2 Second and third convolutes of the Jacobsen's collections, housed today in Hamburg, Köln, Lübeck, Freiburg (Gerhard 1991; Hess 2020).
- 3 Haberland (1979) includes 33 illustrations of the Berlin Jacobsen Collection. It is possible that more exhibits were borrowed from Berlin.
- 4 Haberland continued his research on the Jacobsen Collection over the next 10 years, now publishing in English (Haberland 1987, 1988, 1989).
- 5 Penny 2018, last accessed 27 September 2023, <https://boasblogs.org/dcntr/exasperation/>
- 6 "A Different Approach to the World: The Humboldt Forum in the Berlin Palace. A first look at the lab" (2009–2010).
- 7 Andreas Etges, Viola König (project directors) Peter Bolz, Rainer Hatoum, Tina Brüderlin.
- 8 The Laboratory was financed by the German Federal Cultural Foundation.
- 9 Former name Tanaina, Athabaskan group who live in the Cook Inlet area of south-central Alaska.
- 10 For a description of the collection, see Labischinski (2018/19).
- 11 Klein (2008), 164 referring to "Jacobsen 1977: 198–199."
- 12 Klein (2008): three masks (IV A 6674–76), an infant cradle (IV A 6678), a figurine (IV A 6679).
- 13 The community of Nanwalek belongs along with six others to the Chugach Corporation.
- 14 Nanwalek History Project Description. Online: <https://nanwalekhistory.com>. Last accessed 10/08/2022.
- 15 For more of "Being Aware of Our Beginnings," see www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=1153566. Last accessed 10/08/2022.
- 16 Email Helen Morris to Viola König 16 July 2015.
- 17 Catalogued as Nos. IVA 6674–6682.
- 18 In August 2017, Johnson and König met at the corporation's Anchorage office to agree on the final technical details of restitution.
- 19 See www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=1153566. Last accessed 10/08/2022.
- 20 See more at https://doczz.fr/doc/65189/the-turning-circle_. Last accessed 10/08/2022.
- 21 Excerpt from a commentary by Aaron Glass for the author, 19 October 2016.

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9 Vegetal Entanglements

Flowers and Medical Herbs as Wissensfiguren in Chinese Art and Visual Culture

Juliane Noth

Introduction

In light of academic discussions of the Anthropocene in the humanities and new materialism in philosophy, plants have in recent years shifted into the focus of speculative philosophy (e.g., in Marder 2013, 2014, 2016; Nealon 2016), art theory, and contemporary art production (*inter alia*, Zinnenburg Carroll 2017; Aloï 2018, 2019; and several special issues of the art journal *Antennae* on the theme of “Vegetal Entanglements”). Thinking about plants has become a tool to leave behind the anthropocentric world view that ultimately led to widespread destruction of natural resources. Michael Marder, a philosopher who has been placing plants in the centre of his recent writing, stresses “the plasticity and receptivity of vegetal life, its constitutive capacity for symbiosis and metamorphosis, its openness to the other at the expense of fixed identities (even the identity ensconced in genetics) revealed, by their very vitality, as illusory” (Marder 2016, 16). The potential of plants to lead us to “considering new modes of attention and crafting new modalities of perception” is highlighted by Giovanni Aloï in response to the question “Why look at plants?” in the title of an edited volume (Aloï 2019, xx). Plants are also presented and represented in contemporary art and exhibition spaces as actors in human–plant relationships, and sometimes even in sexual relationships like in Zheng Bo’s ecosexual film series *Pteridophilia*.¹

In these works, plants are understood as agents that offer a mode of thinking or engaging with the world that differs from the presumably destructive rationality associated with the Anthropocene. However, as soon as plants are transferred into the framework of art, they are no longer independent agents in a natural habitat, but subject to the physical handling and the intellectual projections visited upon them by artists and viewers. This point is arguably even more evident in historical paintings or book illustrations (as opposed to actual living plants that confront us with their presence in an exhibition space, a garden, or a forest). Their image is transmitted through cultural practices and deeply embedded in these. Therefore, it is not possible to think about their representations outside the framework of the symbolism, nutritional, or medical values, and the aesthetics that humans ascribed to

them. Flowers (and other plants) are *Wissensfiguren* shaped by cultures of knowledge.²

Although paintings of flowers and grasses form a major genre in premodern Chinese art, they have so far not been studied in the light of the vegetal aesthetics outlined above. Whereas flower paintings have been studied as symbols of literati ideals (e.g., Harrist 1987; Murck 1995; Bickford 1996; Chiem 2017) and as expressions of auspicious wishes (Bartholomew 1985; Bickford 2006, 2013), the question how their visual, olfactory, nutritious, and pharmaceutical qualities contribute to the ways in which humans engage with them and represent them in pictures has so far not been treated. Similarly, the growing literature on pharmaceuticals in premodern China has so far neglected a discussion of the visual representations of drugs (Unschuld 1986; Bian 2022; Nappi 2009, 83–95).³

In this paper, I will aim to combine the approaches of Critical Plant Studies and of aesthetics of knowledge in order to embark on a preliminary attempt to probe how flowers, grasses, and other plants shape their own formation as *Wissensfiguren*. It can be argued that the qualities and properties of flowers, herbs, and vegetables produce the knowledge and symbolic uses that accreted around them. Therefore, I will attempt a cross-reading of visual and textual sources to follow the entanglements of art and visual culture, local history, poetry, and medicine. After discussing an album by Huang Binhong (1865–1955) in which these aspects are consciously intertwined, I will turn to two painting albums from the collection of the Museum of Asian Art in Berlin in which these entanglements are less obvious.

Taking the motif of the orchid in Jiang Yujian's album *Lingering Fragrance of the Rivers Yuan and Li* and in the album *Nine Songs* by an unidentified artist as a point of departure, I will link these works to botanical and pharmaceutical knowledge and image production as it was transmitted in *materia medica* such as the famous *Bencao gangmu* by Li Shizhen (1518–1593). The different forms of knowledge—botanical, visual, artistic, literary, historical, gender-related, somatic, dietetic, and pharmaceutical—that intersect in the orchid as a *Wissensfigur* can also serve as a heuristic device to think about interconnections and mutual elucidations between the different forms of knowledge that shape museum collections. The Museum of Asian Art that houses the two albums discussed here, the Ethnological Museum in Berlin and the Berlin State Library with the collection objects and manuscripts related to Chinese medicine donated by Paul Unschuld, and the Botanical Museum are representative of these different knowledge systems that could be brought into a conversation about floral images.

Botanical Knowledge and Local Histories in Painting Albums of Rare Herbs

These aspects intersect in a painting album of eight leaves by Huang Binhong from the collection of the Zhejiang Provincial Museum in Hangzhou. In each

leaf, paintings of one to three plants are accompanied by inscriptions giving the name of the plants and a brief description, mostly in the form of poems. The plants include specimens that are frequently found as painting motifs, such as crabapple (*haitang*, leaf 1), magnolia (*yulan*, leaf 5), and daylily (*zhuxuan*, leaf 6), but also flowers with names that can be translated as “inverted cup flower” (*fubeihua*), “white velvet” (*baijianrong*), and “purple dawn cup” (*zixiabei*) (Figure 9.1). These flowers are specific to Mount Huang and are listed as “Products of the Mountain” (*shanchan*) in the *Gazetteer of Mount Huang* published during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911).⁴ The album, which is published under the generic title *Flower Paintings*, actually shows the subject of *Rare Flowers of Mount Huang*. Mount Huang in Anhui Province is famous for its scenic beauty and in the 17th century became a much-frequented destination for elite travellers. The mountain also became the subject of literary travelogues, poetry, and cultural histories as well as a much-depicted motif for painters of the local Anhui or Xin’an School (Cahill 1981, 1992; McDermott 1989, 144–76). Most of these paintings were landscapes showing the famous sites of the mountain, but albums of *Rare Flowers of Mount Huang* such as those created by the monk-painter Xue Zhuang (fl. ca. 1690–after 1718), by Huang Binhong’s ancestor Huang Lü (fl. late 17th–early 18th cent.), or by Xu Naigu (1785–1835) were part of the cultural production accreting around the mountain.

The combination of botanical knowledge and the writing of local histories in these albums is most clearly expressed in the *Rare Flowers* album painted by Xu Naigu in 1804 (Figure 9.1): The flowers are arranged to resemble natural growth, emerging from soil or from behind rocks, but in a manner that displays their botanical characteristics with precision; accordingly, they are painted in what in Chinese painting terminology is called the boneless method, i.e., without ink outlines, and without revealing a personal hand. In the inscriptions facing the painted leaves, the entries on the respective plants from the *Gazetteer of Mount Huang* are transcribed. These short entries note their morphological characteristics such as growth, colour, and size of the blossoms, and resemblance to other plants. The painting album adds visual information to the written knowledge recorded in the gazetteer. Huang Lü’s album is similar to Xu Naigu’s in presenting the flowers in aesthetic entanglements evoking an encounter in nature, while recording their morphology in great detail. Their names are recorded next to them, but no further textual information is provided.

Huang Binhong’s album differs from these two earlier examples in several respects. First of all, it should be noted that his album apparently is a copy of an earlier work signed by an unidentified county prefect with the style name Mr. Huihou and probably dating to the 18th century.⁵ Like in Huang Lü’s and Xu Naigu’s albums, the flowers are arranged in a manner that has a natural appearance but allows a display of their physical characteristics. They grow into the pictures and occasionally become entangled, while at the same time allowing the viewer to discern their specific traits. It is highly likely that



Figure 9.1 Xu Naigu (1785–1835), Four Radiances Flower and Inverted Cup Flower, leaf 9 from the album *Rare Flowers of Mount Huang*, 1804, ink and colour on paper, 25.5 × 21.75 cm, © Zhejiang Provincial Museum, Hangzhou.

Mr. Huihou's original was painted in the same boneless manner as the two 18th- and 19th-century examples. It takes on a more personal note, however, by choosing a poetic form for the inscriptions. Moreover, by citing poems by Xue Zhuang on the *chapu* flower and by Yizhi on the “jewelled lid flower” (*baogaihua*), Mr. Huihou enters into a poetic dialogue with these two local monk-painters—and possibly with their paintings of these subjects.

In the leaf depicting the “inverted cup flower” (*fubeihua*), “white velvet” (*baijianrong*), and “purple dawn cup” (*zixiabei*) (Figure 9.2), the short texts inscribed next to the flowers' names combine botanical knowledge, local history, and literary learning, blending the documentary with individual perception and poetic craft. They describe the plants' physical properties, their colour and taste, their medical and intoxicating qualities with learned allusions to wine, drinking, and calligraphy in poetic verse. The inscription to the purple dawn cup ends with the remark that Purple Dawn Tea is a local product of Ruanxi, a stream and eponymic village on Mount Huang. The focus is thereby shifted beyond a visual documentation of the physical features towards the flowers as herbs that are potent as wine, tea, and medicinal drugs. The sensual perception likewise is expanded from viewing to ingesting. The flowers are thus introduced into another framework of knowledge, allowing us to connect them to inquiries from multiple disciplines.



Figure 9.2 Huang Binhong (1865–1955), Inverted Cup Flower, White Velvet, and Purple Dawn Cup, leaf 2 from *Album of Flower Paintings*, ca. 1940s, ink and colour on paper, © Zhejiang Provincial Museum, Hangzhou.

In addition to this creation of complex *Wissensfiguren*, the images are highly personalised in Huang Binhong's rendering, which stresses the effects of brushwork derived from epigraphic calligraphy. Whereas in Huang Lü's and Xu Naigu's albums the delicacy of the petals and the subtlety of the colours

are rendered in the boneless mode without strong contour lines, Huang Binhong's flowers are rendered in black outlines that somewhat paradoxically combine a cursory sketchiness and the skeletal strength of a vigorously drawn brush. His writing likewise is at the same time bold and irregular. The album of rare flowers is thus profoundly transformed by Huang Binhong's distinctive brushwork. The tension between botanical representation and poetic-digestive evocation in Mr. Huihou's album is further complicated by the physical presence of the "bones" (in calligraphic terminology) of the ink outlines and his personal hand.

Ink Orchids and Somatic Aesthetics

The bone metaphor in theories of calligraphy is discussed by John Hay in his essay on the correlations between the human body and the theoretical conceptions of Chinese calligraphy (which can be extended to painting), "The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Values in Chinese Calligraphy" from 1983. Hay cites the *Battle Array of the Brush by Lady Wei* (*Wei furen bizhentu*), a text attributed to Wang Xizhi (303–361) but probably dating to the Tang dynasty (618–907), on the somatic qualities of calligraphy:

Calligraphy by those good in brush strength has much bone; that by those not good in brush strength has much flesh. Calligraphy that has much bone but slight flesh is called sinew-writing; that with much flesh but slight bone is called ink-pig. Calligraphy with much strength and rich in sinew is of sage-like quality; that with neither strength nor sinew is sick. Every writer proceeds in accordance with the manifestation of their digestion and respiration of energy, *xiaoxi*.⁶

Hay reads the early classic of Chinese medicine, the *Huangdi neijing* ("The Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor") from around the 2nd century BCE (*Huang di nei jing ling shu* 2015; see also Unschuld 1995, 30–31), and its interpretation by Manfred Porkert (1974) and others together with references to the human body in calligraphy theory. He describes calligraphy as one possible actualisation of potentiality, and as a conduit for *qi*, which he translates as "energy" (Hay 1983, 90 and 94–95). As he observes, it is the interplay of a somatic structure in the characters and the dispersion/channelling of energy in the act of writing that allows calligraphic works to instill an immediate response even in viewers who have no previous knowledge of the Chinese language or culture (Hay 1983, 74). Hay's reading establishes a connection between the fields of medicine and the concepts of human body that not only sheds light on calligraphic aesthetics but also allows us to rethink the connections between the fields of art and medicine from the perspective of the arts.

A reading in terms of energetic lines can also be applied to paintings of ink orchids, a subgenre of flower painting that was formed during the Yuan

dynasty.⁷ Symbolically, the orchid represents the noble and loyal scholar who is unrecognised by his ruler and lives in the “wilderness” of reclusion or exile. The classical reference is to the poet Qu Yuan who was exiled by the king of the state of Chu after admonishing his sovereign; he eventually drowned himself. The authorship of several works from the poetry collection *Chuci* (*Songs of Chu*), which are rich in orchid imagery, is traditionally attributed to him. On the formal level, ink orchids typically combine a very limited number of pictorial elements governed by representational conventions—long leaves painted in black ink, blossoms rendered in paler ink, rocks, or soil often rendered in the technique called “flying white,” and thorny shrubs.⁸ These limitations allow the painter a display of calligraphic virtuosity in the energetic rendering of the long and slender leaves in a single, modulated line and in the interplay of lines and voids as well as, typically, flower images and poetic texts on the painting surface.

An album by Jiang Yujian (active 1822–1838) in the collection of the Museum of Asian Art Berlin can serve as an example.⁹ In each leaf, the painter displays the extremely limited number of pictorial elements in a new arrangement, concentrating on the fluid black lines of the long, curving leaves, the paler and more tautly rendered blossoms, loose, undulating lines indicating the soil from which the flower grows. He brings the poetic inscriptions rendered in running script in a playful dialogue with the pictorial elements—placing them within the earthen boulders, beneath the curved line of an orchid leaf, or writing them across the sky. The album’s title, *Lingering Fragrance of the Rivers Yuan and Li*, is a reference to the region around Lake Dongting where Qu Yuan was exiled, and the inscriptions are full of allusions to him and his moral integrity (Ledderose 1998, 310). The first poem introduces the album with the classical tropes of orchid symbolism, evoking the flower hidden amidst brambles, but filling the forest air with its fragrance—a metaphor for the superiority of the unrecognised scholar caught in adverse circumstances.¹⁰ The text on the final leaf (Figure 9.3) is a reprise of the first, suggesting that the fragrant orchid and the thorny brambles should be separated, and the deviant weeded out so that the orchid’s roots might find space.¹¹ This suggestion is realised in the composition, where the orchid, clinging to the edge of the image with its roots, and a bundle of thorny, but deracinated twigs are separated by the text of the inscription as well as by the stylistic handling: Whereas the flower’s leaves are again spreading out in fluent lines that seem animated by an inner movement, the twigs are drawn with a more centred brush tip and more restrained lines, containing their energy, which is released only in the short, sharp lines of the thorns. The moral judgment that is implied in the dichotomy of orchids and weeds is thus translated into not only formal difference but also into differences in freely flowing and blocked energies. The result of insufficiently controlled energies is the subject of leaf b, where the orchid is rooted in the centre of the image and loosely circling downwards and up again to reconnect with the inscription. Here, the artist comments on the seemingly



Figure 9.3 Jiang Yujian (active 1822–1838), Leaf 1 from the album *Lingering Fragrance of the Rivers Yuan and Li*, ink on paper, 20 × 25.3 cm, © Museum of Asian Art Berlin.

disconnected composition and counters this possible criticism by pointing to the complementarity of light and dark, long and short. Finally, he takes the leaves of the orchid as his own eyebrows, thereby establishing a direct link between the formal properties of the painting and the individual physiognomy of the painter. The orchid therefore not only serves as the much-evoked symbol of integrity and moral uprightness, it also ties this symbolic function to the body and the personality of the person wielding the brush. This connection is established in the actualisation of energies brought about by the act of writing and painting. But, besides establishing the link between ink orchid painting and physiological conceptions of the human body, I would like to probe into the possible role played by the medicinal qualities of the orchid and other flowers.

Flower Imagery and Shamanism in the Nine Songs

As mentioned earlier, the classical reference on which orchid symbolism is based is the figure of Qu Yuan and the use of orchid imagery in the anthology

Chuci that was, in part, attributed to him at the time of its editing by Wang Yi in the 2nd century BCE.¹² Among the poems formerly attributed to Qu are the *Nine Songs* (*Jiuge*). With their descriptions of shamanic journeys, the *Nine Songs* are poetic documents of early religious practice in the state of Chu (Waley 1955; Hawkes 1985, 38; Michael 2017, 2019).

Each poem is dedicated to a deity invoked by the shaman, who is seeking to establish an erotic relationship with the deity; the stages and sites of the shaman's quests are described with profuse botanical imagery. As Thomas Michael has remarked, "the most striking and elaborate representation of erotic and amorous flower offerings from a male shaman to a female spirit comes in *Xiang furen*" [*The Lady of the Xiang River*]:

I build a house in the water
 The walls and roof of lotus,
 The court of purple cyprus,
 The hall of fragrant xanthoxylum,
 Beams of osmanthus with orchid rafters,
 Shingles of magnolia, bowers of peony,
 Lintels of woven fig-leaves,
 Bed-curtain screens of plaited coumarou,
 White jades driven to hold everything in place,
 Stone-orchids spread for their fragrance,
 The lotus chamber ceilinged with iris,
 Woven together with stalks of asarum,
 I place a hundred bouquets to fill the court,
 Their aromas wafting through the porch and the walls.
 (Thomas Michael 2017, 7–8)

This poem, along with the other *Nine Songs*, is illustrated in a painting album in the collection of the Museum of Asian Art Berlin. It bears a seal of the Northern Song painter Li Gonglin (1049–1106), whose name is associated with a pictorial tradition of the *Nine Songs*, but it actually dates to the 19th century. Its meticulous painting style in ink and colours on silk represents a mode fundamentally different from the energetic lines of monochrome ink in Jiang Yujian's orchid album. Originally painted as a long handscroll, its arrangement of each image being followed by the poem illustrated still adheres to the conventions of early narrative handscrolls.¹³ In the leaf that combines the songs *The Goddess of the Xiang River* and *The Lady of the Xiang River* as well as images of the two sister goddesses (leaf c), the only pictorial reference to this plant symbolism is an inverted lotus leaf that the Lady of Xiang is holding up towards her sister who brandishes a pair of swords, while both seem to soar through the air on a winged dragon and a white horse. The image with the richest depiction of flowers and trees is that of the *Mountain Spirit* (leaf g, Figure 9.4), a close rendition of the spirit's description in the respective song:



Figure 9.4 Unidentified artist, with spurious seal of Li Gonglin (ca. 1041–1106), *Mountain Spirit*, leaf g from the album *Nine Songs*, 19th century, ink and colours on silk, 34.2 × 59.2 cm, © Museum of Asian Art Berlin.

Driving tawny leopards, leading the striped lynxes;
 A car of lily magnolia with banner of woven cassia;
 Her cloak of stone orchids, her belt of asarum;
 She gathers sweet scents to give to the one she loves.
 (Hawkes 1985, 115)

The Mountain Spirit is represented as a beautiful young woman surrounded by additional fragrant flowers: She wears a cloak of leaves around her shoulders and fixes her gaze on an orchid blossom. Her chariot appears to be made from the wood of the magnolia that protectively stretches a flowering branch over her head. A large pot with branches of pine and cypress balances her weight. The banner of *gui* (“woven cassia” in Hawkes’ translation) is carried by a horned demon who guards the leopard-drawn chariot of the Mountain Spirit. *Gui*, the second most named plant in the *Chuci* after the orchid, can be translated as either cinnamon, cassia, or osmanthus (Chennault 2006, 152f.). In the Berlin album leaf of the *Mountain Spirit*, the blossoms of the osmanthus tree with their intense and pervasive fragrance announce the Spirit’s arrival.

The flower motifs in *Chuci* poetry function not only as symbols of moral virtues or as adornments that aid the shaman’s quest to seduce the spirits into an erotic relationship with the aid of their beauty and fragrance. Considering that, as David Hawkes has remarked, shamans were responsible for collecting and dispensing medicinal herbs (1985, 45), it seems likely

that the medicinal potency of these plants was crucial to their central role in shamanistic rituals.

The sheer number of plants and the early date of the *Chuci* make an identification complicated and have, for example, led to major differences in the translations of their names by various authors.¹⁴ Arthur Waley and Martin Kern have remarked upon the difficulties in translating the word *lan*, commonly translated as “orchid,” and have pointed out that it is botanically incorrect. Moreover, as Waley states, “*lan* in ancient times seems to have been applied to many different kinds of aromatic plant” (1955, 17).¹⁵ The identification of the *gui* poses similar difficulties. As a motif in Chinese poetry, the *gui* has been the subject of two studies. Martin Kern described the development of the *gui* from a motif referring to a “precious, medically and magically potent aromatic to a concept that is ritually and representatively meaningful and further into an emblematic aesthetic variable” in a process of continuous literarisation.¹⁶ An approach that is taking the opposite direction, so to speak, is adapted by Cynthia Chennault in her detailed analysis of the role of olfactory and medical properties of both cinnamon and osmanthus (2006, 151–181). Based on botanical and geographical information as well as *materia medica*, she studies how the material qualities of the plants and their processing were used as metaphors, describing a shift of meaning from the bark of the cinnamon tree as a drug conducive to achieving immortality in early poetry such as the *Chuci*, to the fragrant osmanthus flower in Buddhist poetry, in what she calls a “supplanted identity” (2006, 176 and 178).

Within the scope of this article, it is not possible to investigate the botanical or pharmaceutical roots of the orchid, or *lan*, in comparable depth, but for a preliminary inquiry, I will undertake a reading on the relevant entries in the most canonical Chinese encyclopaedia on *materia medica*, the *Bencao gangmu* by Li Shizhen (1518–1593), based on the recent annotated translation by Paul Unschuld.

The Orchid as Wissensfigur in Medical Literature

In the chapter on fragrant herbs, the *Bencao gangmu* contains three entries related to plants named *lan*: *lancao* (“orchid herb,” *Eupatorium phiopo* Turcz.), *zelan* (“marshland orchid,” bugleweed, *Lycopus lucidus* Turcz.), and *malan* (“horse or big orchid,” purple chrysanthemum, *Kalimeris indica* (L.) Sch.-Bip.) (Li Shizhen 2021, 656–673). Of these three, the first two are identified as related and thus treated in comparison. The entry on *lancao* is the most extensive, listing diverse name variants, etymologies, literary sources, and pharmaceutical applications for diseases such as “melting with thirst” (possibly diabetes), swelling, poisoning, and irregularities of the menstrual cycle. One common use, judging from the number of mentions, is the preparation of ointments to provide fragrance and glossiness for the hair (2021, 636 and fn. 720). An issue that surfaces at several points across the entry is the distinction between *lancao* (“orchid herb”) and *lanhua* (“orchid flower”).

Li Shizhen goes to considerable lengths to rectify a misidentification of the two plants. For example, he cites Kou Zongshi, the author of *Bencao yanyi* (*Extended Meanings of Materia Medica*, 1116), who obviously describes the *lanhua* that became a symbol of the reclusive literatus:

It mostly grows in yin (i. e., shady) regions and dark valleys. The leaves are similar to those of *ophiopogon*, but wider and pliable, with a length of one to two *chi*. They remain greenish throughout the four seasons. The flowers are yellow-green. On the petals are fine purple dots. Those that are fragrant in spring are the “spring *lan*.” Their color is deep. Those that are fragrant in autumn, they are the “autumn *lan*.” Their color is light. When they open, they fill an entire room with fragrance, and this is different from the fragrance of other flowers.

(Li Shizhen 2021, 660)

Li Shizhen then corrects this identification stating that this description matches the “*lan hua* of today, not the *lan cao* of antiquity.” He proceeds to cite various ancient sources on the ritual and medical uses of *lan*, including Qu Yuan’s poem *Lisao* (“Encountering Sorrow”) from the *Chuci*:

And the *Li sao* says: “Its green leaves, purple stem and plain twigs can be tied [to bundles], can be worn as ornaments, can be made to ceremonial mats, can be made to ointments, and can be made into bath liquids.” ... Now, *lan hua* has leaves but no twigs. It can be enjoyed [by looking at it], but it cannot be tied to bundles, worn as an ornament, made to ceremonial mats and processed into a bath liquid. It cannot be held in the hands, or used as an ointment or burned [to effuse fragrant fumes].

(Li Shizhen 2021, 661)

His detailed discussion of a wide array of sources makes clear that the orchid so frequently encountered in later Chinese painting is actually not the same plant as the *lan* that is so profusely cited throughout the *Lisao* and the *Nine Songs*.

The prominence of the orchid as a symbol of moral integrity and subject of formal exploration in painting apparently led the editors of the illustrations for the *Bencao gangmu* to take an unusual step:¹⁷ They included not only pictures of the *lancao*, the *zelan*, and the *malan*, which have entries in the *Bencao gangmu*, but also of the *lanhua*, or orchid (Figure 9.5a and b), that so frequently serves as a painting motif, but has no entry of its own in the *materia medica*.¹⁸

The power of the conventions shaped by literati uses of the orchid in poetry and painting is even more evident in the illustrations for the imperially sponsored encyclopaedia of *materia medica*, the *Yuzhi bencao pinhui jingyao* (*Materia medica*, written on imperial order, containing essential data arranged in systematic order, 1505), which were copied by Wen Chu



Figure 9.5 Left: Illustrations of orchid herb (*lancao*, top left) and marshland orchid (*zelan*, bottom left). Right: Illustrations of orchid flower (*lanhua*, top right) and horse orchid (*malan*, bottom right). Li Shizhen (1518–1593), *Bencao gangmu*, Jiangxi edition (1603), first illustration chapter, pp. 37a–b, woodblock printed book. © National Library of China, Rare Books Collection, Beijing.

(1595–1634).¹⁹ The imperial edition contains only one entry related to *lan*, namely on *lancao*. The core physiological information given on the plant is the description of the orchid by Kou Zongshi, quoted above (Liu Wentai et al. 2000). It is therefore of no surprise that the illustration by Wen Chu should depict the orchid that is familiar to viewers from countless paintings (Figure 9.6). But she also chose a different mode of depiction for this particular flower: The orchid is not presented in the mode of encyclopaedic illustrations, with a neutral background and in a schematised fashion that displays the entire plant from root to blossom, a mode which the illustrators of the *Bencao gangmu* chose and which she herself chose for most other plants illustrated in her album. Instead, her image shows a flower growing on a hilly slope, backed by two rocks, its leaves elegantly curved. In short,



Figure 9.6 Wen Chu (1595–1634), Orchid Herb, page from *Appearances of Metal, Stone, Insects and Plants*, chapter “Plants, Part Three,” 1617–1620, string-bound book manuscript, ink and colours on paper, 24.5 × 17.5 cm, © National Central Library, Taipei.

the painterly conventions of the orchid genre and its associated symbolism overlay the documentary manner that is usually required in the illustrations of medical literature.

Conclusion

Painting histories, poetry, botanical knowledge, and pharmaceutical applications pertain to distinct epistemologies and practices that intersect in

the *Wissensfigur* of the orchid/*lancao* or in the rare herbs of Mount Huang; this can lead us to different readings depending on which of the intersecting and entangled threads we follow. These epistemologies also shaped the acquisition policies and display strategies of museum collections: art collections, ethnological collections, or museums of natural history bring different perspectives on the objects in the galleries and storage rooms and construct different histories around them, focusing on histories of artistic discourse, poetic metaphors, cultural practices, medical treatments, or botanical knowledge, to name only a few examples. Flowers with their tangled roots, their fragrance, their visual beauty and complexity, and their medical potency can serve as powerful metaphors for this task. As *Wissensfiguren*, they enable us to trace the entanglements of these different knowledge systems and to uncover how they shape our perceptions and readings of objects and how they occlude others.

Notes

- 1 http://zhengbo.org/download/Zheng_Bo_2020.pdf, pp. 4–25 [accessed 8 March 2023].
- 2 “Wissensfiguren wie die Blume können nicht isoliert entstehen, sondern müssen in übergreifenden Zusammenhängen einer Poetologie des Wissens betrachtet werden, in einer ‘Perspektive, die die Herstellung von Wissensobjekten und Aussagen unmittelbar mit der Frage nach deren Inszenierung und Darstellbarkeit verknüpft.’ Im Fall der Blume bedeutet dies nach den Strukturen zu fragen, innerhalb derer ein Wissen über sie überhaupt erst generiert werden kann.” (Kranz et al. 2016, p. 28. citing Joseph Vogl, ed. München, Wilhelm Fink, 1999, p. 7.)
- 3 Fan Lin of Leiden University as well as Ruiying Gao (University of Kansas), Chen Sarah Huang (City University of Hong Kong), and Mengxi Zhao (University of Heidelberg) are currently working on botanical illustrations in *materia medica* and famine manuals. I have not been able to consult their work so far.
- 4 Min Linsi, *Huangshan zhi dingben* (1705 edition), *juan 2*, p. 166, after *Zhongguo difangzhi xuji* database, <https://huntenq-1com-1009ac79t0166.erf.sbb.spk-berlin.de/ancientc/ancientkm?@@303071742#kmtop> [accessed 5 April 2023].
- 5 It is dated according to the cyclical year *guimao*. This could refer to the years 1723, 1783, 1843, or 1903. The inclusion in the album of two poems by the monk-painter Xuezhuang (fl. ca. 1690–after 1718) and his student Yizhi allows us rule out an earlier date.
- 6 *Bizhentu*, cited in English translation by Hay (1983, p. 85). Romanization is adapted to Hanyu Pinyin. On the *Bizhentu*, see Barnhart (1964, p. 19).
- 7 Qian Zhan, a doctoral student at the Art History Department of Freie Universität Berlin, is currently working on the formation of this genre in a dissertation preliminarily titled “Zheng Sixiao’s *Molan tu* (Ink Orchid): A Study on the Rise and Development of Orchid Painting during the Song and Yuan Dynasties.”
- 8 These conventions are repeated in very similar phrasings in several painting manuals; a classical reference is the *Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual*, Vol. 2, here cited after Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo gudai hualun leibian*, Beijing 2004 (1959), vol. 2, pp. 1122–1126.

- 9 The album is discussed in detail by Ledderose (1986) and in Ledderose (1998, pp. 304–314).
- 10 Cf. the German translation by Lothar Ledderose. Leaf a: Sie wächst aus dem Gestrüpp hervor, so hoch wie kaum ein Fuß, / doch allseits in der Wildnis spüre ich ihr lauter Aroma. / Den ganzen Pfad verzaubert eine kühle Wolke, / den ganzen Wald durchweht der Duft des Taus.
- 11 Cf. Ledderose 1998, p. 310, leaf l: Die Orchidee blüht im dornigen Gestrüpp, / doch sicher nimmt ihr Duft dadurch nicht ab. / Doch wär's nicht besser, sie zu trennen? / Gut und Schlecht sind doch von recht verschied'nem Nutzen! / Das Andersartige muß sicher ausgejätet werden, / gestützt auf ihre Wurzeln findet sie dann Platz. / Dir schicke ich diese Worte, der du am Ufer wandelst, / vergieß doch nicht die Tränen des Beamten ohne Amt!
- 12 On the *Chuci* and questions of authorship, see Hawkes (1985, pp. 28–41).
- 13 For a detailed discussion of this album, see Ledderose (1998, pp. 324–338).
- 14 For a comparison of English translations of plant names in the *Lisao*, a poem by Qu Yuan anthologized in the *Chuci*, and an attempt to match them with photographs of eponymous plants, see Zhou and Tian (2019, pp. 1–6).
- 15 Cf. Kern (1994, p. 12), who chooses to leave *lan* and *gui* untranslated.
- 16 “Die Entwicklung des *kuei* von der botanischen Bezeichnung eines kostbaren, medizinisch und magisch wirksamen Aromatikums zu einem vor allem in ritueller und repräsentativer Hinsicht bedeutsamen Begriff und weiter zu einer zeichenhaften ästhetischen Variable ist insgesamt als ein Prozeß fortschreitender Literarisierung und Profanierung zu beschreiben” (Kern 1994, p. 18).
- 17 The illustrations to the first edition (the so-called Jinling edition from 1593) were provided by Li Shizhen's sons, Li Jianyuan and Li Jianmu; the edition I accessed is the second, so-called Jiangxi edition from 1603 [Li Shizhen 1602]. On the editions, see Li Shizhen 2021, 23.
- 18 Li Shizhen, *Bencao gangmu*, vol. 1, Yuan Guoli Beijing tushuguan jiaku shenben congshu, ed. by Zhongguo goujia tushuguan, vol. 501, 23.
- 19 I would like to thank Kuang Yue, a doctoral student at Freie Universität Berlin, for bringing this album to my attention.

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10 From Index Cards to Digital Catalogues

Incomplete Object Documentation as Reflection Space

Quoc-Tan Tran

Introduction

Within the last few decades, cultural heritage institutions such as archives, libraries, and museums have been breaking from the old forms of social, collective memory-making, and relying more on digital infrastructures for enabling modes of support, instantaneous communication, and global interconnectivity (Cameron and Kenderdine 2007; Benardou et al. 2018). In the museum sector, maintaining infrastructure to support the institution's connective capacities, both internally and externally, is a crucial set of activities that is at the core of its information architecture and knowledge production. This contribution focuses on the entangled setting and local constraints in the backstage or “behind the scenes” (Macdonald 2002) of the museum, where the realities of life are messy, mistakes are common, and the experience of those within it is frequently hidden from those working in the foreground. This chapter aims to reveal hidden assumptions, value hierarchies, and biases inherent in the maintenance work of museum knowledge systems. It argues that, as documentation activities and associated support work become invisible once an action is inscribed in infrastructure (Bowker and Star 1999), they have a significant impact on the smooth operation of institutional memory-making.

The study looks at the types of socio-technical negotiations taking place in the backstage and their effect on infrastructural changes associated with more open modes of knowledge production. These negotiations occur in the development of three generations of museum collection catalogues:

1. Index cards.
2. Integrated collections documentation systems.
3. A centralised online catalogue.

There are three distinct modes of object representation at the Museum Europäischer Kulturen (MEK—Museum of European Cultures), which is one of 17 museum and 4 institute members within the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (SMB—National Museums in Berlin). These institutions are all

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affiliated with the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (SPK—Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation), one of the largest cultural employers in Germany. The study demonstrates how collections management has developed “craftwork” characteristics throughout the complex institutional history: interconnected lines of work, translation of know-how, and the value of “good hands.” It does so by examining the challenges and difficulties when MEK converted more than 100,000 index cards into digital catalogue entries and integrated its knowledge management systems with the centralised digital catalogue maintained by SMB. Analysing cataloguing activities in both physical and digital contexts, the contribution demonstrates how museum staff gains instructive experiences through repair, improvisation, resistance, and ambiguity in the backstage of institutional memory-making processes.

Infrastructural Relations in Museum Documentation

Museums have been increasingly viewed as engaging spaces where the public acts as active individual agents in the meaning-making processes and staff function as enablers and facilitators (Hooper-Greenhill et al. 2000). Kreps (1998, 5) suggests that it is one thing to construct the physical components of a museum—the “hardware,” but quite another to develop the “software” that will complement and support the former. There are various interpretations of socio-technical tensions in museum institutions indicating that the hardware and software parts do not always get along. Museum anthropology scholars have recently addressed these tensions as part of the historical underpinnings of established collection management knowledge (Krmopotich and Somerville 2016; Macdonald and Morgan 2019; von Oswald and Tinius 2020). Merriman (2008) considers museums as “historically contingent assemblages” that reflect the tastes and interests of both the times and the people who created them. Turner (2020) examines the legacy of earlier cataloguing systems and organisational models and evaluates the socio-technical aspects of a long history of working with knowledge organisation systems in museums. From an infrastructure studies perspective, the information attributed to any new objects could be read backwards into existing technical systems (Star and Ruhleder 1996)—in our case, index cards, ledger books, and databases—and entities unknown at the time of data collection would be marginalised or simply removed from the data.

Infrastructure can be viewed as an adaptive system where the agential relationships among its technological, social, and human components shift and change over time (Edwards 2003). Social norms, work conventions, organisational routines, tacit knowledge, and skills merge with technological specifications to shape the functionality of infrastructures. Technologies and their affordances define the conditions under which museum work can be performed, whether it is cataloguing, exhibition planning, or even hiring of staff (Turner 2017). The way conservation and documentation professionals approach emerging forms of contemporary art vividly illustrates the

socio-technical negotiations that occur in the museum's daily operations (Engel and Phillips 2018; van Saaze et al. 2018). The proliferation of new art forms has rendered traditional classification systems, knowledge of style and technique, and other parts of technical infrastructure obsolete (Wharton 2018). As these forms have gradually become mainstream in contemporary artistic practice, many museums experience difficulties acquiring, displaying, and preserving works such as time-based media works of art.¹ Engel and Wharton (2017) explain, for example, how complex contemporary artworks complicate the documentation process by frequently defying traditional schemes of classification of arts.

Infrastructures may thus fail if new components incorporated into an infrastructure do not adhere to existing technical protocols, standards, and their specifications (Grisot et al. 2014). The initiation of change or embedding new technologies can create tensions with not only technical artefacts but also human habits, routines, norms, and roles, which may prove to be the “most intractable elements” of infrastructure (Edwards et al. 2009, 366). Science and Technology Studies perspectives on museum practices have suggested that the maintenance and repair of the museum's informational fabric required a great deal of labour and a high degree of specialised knowledge (Stuedahl 2007; Turner 2016). The articulation between different lines of work and areas of expertise, some of which museums sometimes lack (such as IT maintenance and support work), has received less attention in the literature.

Methods and Fieldwork

Data were collected within the frame of the Horizon-2020 research project POEM (Participatory memory practices).² The qualitative data were gathered during ethnographic fieldwork at SMB. The author was granted access to archival shelves, index cards, and museum documentation systems (MDS) while working as a scientist in residence in October 2020 at MEK, an SMB museum that collects, preserves, and exhibits artefacts and testimonies of everyday cultures in Europe from the 18th century to the beginning of the 21st century, located in the Dahlem suburb of Berlin. Although each SMB museum member uses the identical two versions of the documentation system provided by the company zetcom (MuseumPlus Classic and RIA), each has its own method of documenting objects.³ At the end of the third fieldwork phase (late October 2020), both versions MuseumPlus Classic and MuseumPlus RIA were being used simultaneously in MEK.

Throughout the residency, the author observed the routine activities of the MEK staff and took screenshots of MuseumPlus interfaces to gain an understanding of the museum's back-end configuration and laborious preparation of object representation.⁴ After October 2020, when Germany entered another lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the author conducted technical walkthroughs of the interface of SMB-digital,⁵ an online catalogue

of digitised collection from the SMB's museum members. Screenshots and walkthroughs, combined with the photographs taken during the fieldwork, enable an examination of three distinct modes of object presentation: index cards, electronic catalogue systems, and online catalogues.

As socio-technical negotiations are influenced by not only infrastructure practices but also institutional legacies (organisational structure, decision-making processes, record-keeping practices, and classification systems), Star's "ethnography of infrastructure" framework was employed to investigate documentation work, imbuing it with a "ethnographic sensibility" (Star 1999). The fieldwork focused on the backstage operations of museum institutions using an infrastructure-based approach. This theoretical lens enables examination of the infrastructural characteristics hidden within the backstage activities of the museum: hidden layers of working conflicts and incompatibilities of views. In demonstrating how background work is typically carried out by everyday museum staff, silently and unnoticed, this contribution looks at the processes and agencies of this backstage invisibility and delves into the actor worlds of feelings, practices, and knowledge that could have emerged from the entanglement of technical and social negotiations.

Craftwork Features of Collections Documentation

Interconnected Lines of Work

Documentation work consists of straightforward tasks such as identifying the object, photographing it, inputting the object's details, and storing them in an organised manner in the system. Documentation activities, as well as the support tools and systems, constitute the backbone of collections management. Proper upkeep of this backbone enables the institution to avoid damage to its holdings and bottlenecked collections management concerns. MEK lacks specialised staff dedicated to particular tasks related to cataloguing and object data management, such as transferring information from index cards to the digital catalogue or verifying data consistency. This shortage of documentation experts explains why museum staff members from a variety of professions—curator, educator, textile restorer, and photographer—perform documentation-related tasks on the side. They have learned to better their technique while working with imperfect and incomplete tools.

A line of work or a working group within a heritage institution is not a static and closed arrangement. The making of an institutional memory's infrastructure can be seen as both: (1) an incremental construction and (2) a contingent and provisional operation, during which relations might change, conventions might be broken, and failures or phases of stagnation might occur. From an institutional-ecological perspective (Star and Griesemer 1989), each line of work embodies characteristic modes of practice. As a subworld in the Straussian sense, each line of work has its specific kind of problems to be solved, kind of tools and technology to be used, a variety

of applications it should aim for, and a relationship with the social world to which it belongs and where it operates (Kling and Gerson 1978; Strauss 1978). Stefan,⁶ an SMB photographer, describes a typical procedure for photographing museum objects:

I coordinate with [name of colleague], a museologist. Many requests start with her. She talks to me, hi, we have been given that, do you have time to do it, we need it in two weeks. But sometimes we have to talk to the conservators. They have to take a look at the object. Is it possible to transport it? Do they have to do something before I can take the pictures? [...] It's a team of two to three people, including me, who are in charge of a little project.

Interconnected lines of work suggest that the interactional processes involved in making sense of each actor's actions are essential to understanding the infrastructural relations in collections management, exposing the critical role of everyday staff members who take care of the objects. Stefan refers to taking object photographs as "a little project" which involves himself, the museologists and sometimes the conservators. In the task of taking object photographs, the division of labour was based on the type of job: photography, museology, conservation, and preservation. The photographer took care of the photos, the museologists took care of the workflow and sent the photo request, and the conservator ensured that the object was kept physically safe. This type of intersection entails both processes of translating know-how and tacit knowledge from one discipline to another and having work procedures standardised into "a form mutually usable for each of the intersecting parties" (Star 1983, 212).

Translation of Know-How

The need for communication across lines of work and institutional boundaries is not simply a matter of work efficiency or productivity. It is recognised as a necessity for transferring tacit knowledge, which seems most efficient when more experienced professionals work together with less experienced colleagues (Onnismaa 2008). In a traditional trade, people who master craftwork provide instructions to apprentices. The master can explain to the apprentice why and how he does what he does, as there are rational principles that govern the know-how.⁷ In his cultural study of craftwork, Crawford (2009, 195) explains how the learning rationale differentiates between the master-apprentice relationship and that in teamwork:

For the apprentice there is a progressive revelation of the reasonableness of the master's actions. He may not know why things have to be done a certain way at first, and have to take it on faith, but the rationale becomes apparent as he gains experience. Teamwork doesn't have this progressive

character. It depends on group dynamics, which are inherently unstable and subject to manipulation.

In modern GLAMs (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums), where databases and support systems perform significant portions of tasks, the instability of team-group dynamics can be mitigated in part by organised documentation processes. On the tactical level, the index-card method of storing object information is different from the modern method of organising museum objects, in which all collections feed their data into an integrated MDS. Both procedures, index card-based and e-catalogue-based, are nevertheless similar in nature. Cataloguing an object requires documenting its history, description, and details.

Let us take a deeper look into the first-generation object cataloguing which is based on index cards. The card in Figure 10.1 was discovered by the author in one of the card archive's drawers at MEK. It was chosen because it is representative of the majority of catalogue cards. The card existed before the cataloguing method with subject groups was introduced in 1935, and the object was not in the digital database. A curator explained that this lack of a digital catalogue entry could mean the object got lost or destroyed in the Second World War. The card contains the following information: The object is an animal figure discovered in the Thuringian village of Großensee; its inventory number is "III.d. 175 L," its category is "35 F 1,"

Stichwort: Spieltiere	Nr.: 35 F 1	Raum: C
Gegenstand: Tierfigur	Kennzeichen: Ton-brauner Hahn	
Ort: (Großensee/Thüringen) Am Eisenach		
Katalog-Nr.: III.d. 175 L	Neg:	Diap.:
Inventar-Nr.: 26/34		

Figure 10.1 The "Animal figure" index card found in the card archive room at MEK.
© Photo by Quoc-Tan Tran.

and its inventory number is “26/34.” The description field indicates that the object is in the shape of a brown clay rooster or an unfired clay rooster (“Ton-brauner Hahn”).

Supplementary sections such as “Thüringen,” “Kr. Eisenach,” or “GK” assist in translating technical language for those unfamiliar with cataloguing methods and classification systems. Prior to 1935, when the current catalogue system with numerical subject groups was introduced, there was a system that referred to the object’s origin. For instance, “III d” stood for “Thüringen,” the German state of Thuringia, “175” stood for the object’s number, and “L” was included because this number originally contained 12 objects (from “A” to “L”). While an experienced museologist with extensive knowledge of the museum’s history and multiple cataloguing systems can interpret this catalogue number, a general staff member such as a photographer or curator assistant will have difficulty deciphering the clues.

Value of “Good Hands”

Staff members help prevent the institutional fabric from becoming fragmented by performing additional duties not specified in their job title. These tasks can be referred to as *caring tasks*: Everyday doings that staff need to carry out to avoid any detriment to the institution’s functioning and its objects. Being asked about the task that takes the most time during her workday, Sophia,⁸ an MEK scientific staff member [*Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin*], responded:

When you add an object to the collection, that’s the most time-consuming task, because you have to give an inventory number to the object, then you have to fill out all these different fields. If you do this properly, it can take up to two hours for one object. You have to measure it, describe it. You give the background information, the context and all that because the better you do this, the more useful the object will be for future generations. Because what we currently suffer from is poor documentation in the past, and so whenever I add an object to the collection, I try to be very thorough, and really take the time to document it very well, but that does take up a lot of time.

The need for caring tasks is motivated by “poor documentation in the past.” As there had not been sufficient protocols on how to measure each type of object, and standards on how to document that sort of information in appropriate data fields, adding a new object to the digital catalogue became very time-consuming. The meticulous and burdensome task of adding a new object and entering its metadata, which according to Sophia “can take up to nearly 2 h,” became a standard or a cascade of standards: give the material an inventory number, measure the object (by assigning an inventory number, the material has become an object), describe the object, give the background

information, and fill out many different fields (where the object comes from, for example). This standardised routine realised by museum staff is to fulfil the requirement of the formal organisation—verifying object information is always part of their job. The task of recording object details is considered to be complete when every necessary field is completed in whatever manner it takes. The metadata fields should be filled out carefully and meticulously, and ready for use by other staff members. Maintaining metadata becomes a collective responsibility so that other staff members are not required to pick up the slack and fill in documentation fields.

From Index Cards to Digital Catalogues

MEK is dedicated to the living environments and cultural contacts in and with Europe from the 18th century to the present day, housing approximately 287,000 objects of everyday life and testimonies related to cultural histories. Officially established in 1999, it resulted from a merger between the Museum für (Deutsche) Volkskunde (Museum of [German] Folklore) and the European collection of the Museum für Völkerkunde (today the Ethnological Museum). The Museum of [German] Folklore was itself the result of the unification of two institutions in 1992: the Museum of Folklore in East Berlin and the Museum of German Folklore in West Berlin.⁹ Throughout the 1980s, these two Berlin institutions broadened their collecting practices beyond preindustrial rural life and artisan culture, concentrating on industrial-era cultural transformation and urban life (Museum of European Cultures 2019, 5). Because of the widely disparate social and cultural development of most European peoples and ethnic groups, the MEK collection is challenging to manage due to its representation of multiple facets of European cultural history and its multiperspectivity. When asked about the most challenging aspects of their daily work, an anonymous MEK employee responded:

There are so many things we wouldn't have collected now. So it's the missing data and the complicated process of conversion and the amount of things that, I suppose, will never be used for anything. Because the whole collection is like nineteenth-century based, they collected mainly nineteenth-century things.

This response alludes to the vast collection and its amorphous nature at MEK. The current collection includes approximately 225,000 items from the former Museum of German Folklore and 40,000 items from the European collection of the Ethnological Museum. The museum is therefore endowed with two distinct cataloguing systems. In the first system, 225,000 items are classified by broad categories, such as children's toys, ritual objects, and women's clothing. The second system, concerning the set of 40,000 items, categorises objects according to geographical location and ethnic

minorities: the catalogue numbers begin with the place code.¹⁰ This variety of categorisation methods demonstrates how difficult it is to keep track of all the information about the objects in the museum's holdings. Such complexities necessitated the use of a digital catalogue system, which allowed for advanced sorting, organising, and retrieval of object information.

Digitisation and System Changes

As of October 2020, 130,000 of a volume of 287,000 objects had an entry in MuseumPlus Classic as a result of intensive conversion work from index cards to digital object entries. The amount was slightly under half of the total, but already an enormous number, as Stefan hinted:

With eight minutes per entry, plus the usual holidays and working time during the year, we came to the conclusion that two persons need three to four years [to finish the data input] and they are not allowed to get sick. Three to four years, these people are just doing nothing else, only to input the entries to the MDS.

The average of 8 min per entry accounts for delays caused by several types of confusion, such as when external service providers performing the conversion were confronted with inconsistent data or unreadable text. Because these workers were not MEK employees, they lacked both background knowledge about the collection and tacit knowledge about object organisation that an MEK employee possessed. This lengthy conversion process was both necessary and irreversible. As time-consuming as any manual data conversion task can be, these activities result in a positive outcome: all object views were digitised in a centralised system, and their associated data was organised in a reliable and scalable manner.

Figure 10.2 depicts the object entry for “Fleckelteppich,” which is translated as “Silesian wool quilt” in its English title. Not the inventory number or category number, but the identifier “501038” in the upper right corner serves as the unique identifier for this object. The digital entry noted that data migration from the legacy system to the MuseumPlus RIA version occurred on 30 November 2020. In the previous version of the digital catalogue system (MuseumPlus Classic), most fields in an object's basic information panel are free-text based. While the free-text format allows for greater flexibility in terms of input content, it severely restricts systematic quality control. If the system administrator wishes to display an error message when invalid data are entered, they must define what constitutes invalid data explicitly. It is challenging to create rules that apply to all 17 museum institutions within SMB. Thus, the free-text format acts as an implicit writing rule: it specifies how information should be written in a data field. It is not technically possible to ensure that the user uses the correct terms in the correct context. No

Objekte (1 gefunden)

Beteiligte			
Titel			
Ident. Nr.	A (17 J 1) 133/1931 (Ident. Nr.)	Sachbegr. Aus...	"Flecketeppich"
Weitere Nummern	alte Katalog-Nr.: I e 1020	Sachbegriff	Ausgabe: "Flecketeppich"
Sys. / Art Aus.	17 J - Wandbehänge	Datierung	1750 – 1800
Systematik / Art	17 J - Wandbehänge	Objektyp	Allgemein

ID: 501038 | Zetcom_migration 30.11.2020 08:50

Bereich MEK-Textilien und Schmuck



Leihfähigkeit ID 501038

1 Grunddaten 2 Objektref. 3 Standort 4 Status 5 Zugang / Inventar 6 Provenienzen 7 Objektbeschreib. 8 Referenzen 9 Konserv. Auflagen 11 Schlagw. / Ikonogr. 12 Typspezif. Daten < >

Erwerb. Datum	1931	Zugang		Erwerb. Notiz	Erwerbung von: Dorgarloh, Berlin
Erwerb. von					
Erwerb. Nr.	133/1931				
Veräußerer					Konvolut
Erwerbungsart	Kauf				
Besitzart	Eigentum				
				Inv. Datum	dd.MM.yyyy Inv. Status
				Archivalien	
				Herkunft Über...	GOS AUSSTELLUNG

Figure 10.2 MDS view of “Silesian wool quilt.” © Photo: Screenshot by Quoc-Tan Tran.

centralised editorial oversees, for example, the vocabulary and writing rules for person and object names.

The challenge posed by object provenance details demonstrates how data handling issues impair an infrastructure's ability to scale beyond a single-site practice. The provenance information is stored in the tab "Zugang/Inventar" (Access/Inventory). To note where the object came from, MEK staff used to include the name of the individual, whether it was a photographer, a collector, or a private donor. Other SMB museums perceive an object's provenance in their own unique way; they wish to include the means of acquisition, such as purchasing, receiving as a donation, or receiving from an auction. Sophia expressed her impatience when confronted with this field:

We always filled out the name of the person that we received the object from. We have, say, 50,000 different entries, depending on the fact that we got objects from 50,000 different people. But there are other collections who use this same field as a list field. Then all the different museums have to agree on how the field is being used in the new system. So the biggest challenge is to get everyone to agree on the parameters for each different field. And each house, each collection has very good arguments of why we should adopt their idea.

Data inconsistency was the most prevalent issue in respect to documentation maintenance work. Since each museum within SMB enters data into the MuseumPlus software in their unique way, it was difficult to get all SMB members to agree on "the parameters for each field." As a result of their inability to agree, the integration of each museum's holdings into the centralised catalogue system became unmanageable.

From Index Cards to Online Catalogue

Traditionally, objects were catalogued using physical, paper-based tools: index cards for cataloguing and registration books for numbering and registering objects. Later, digital solutions were grown onto this existing knowledge infrastructure. The long description view of "Silesian wool quilt" in MuseumPlus RIA demonstrates that the object's description remained consistent over time. While people's perceptions of certain objects may change with time, like those depicting dissonant heritage, the index card's role remains fundamental and indispensable. The index card not only conveys the essence of an object—what distinguishes it from others; it also provides staff with the fundamental knowledge necessary to perform object and data-related tasks. What is incorrect in an index card is precisely what will be incorrect in the digital catalogue entry generated from it.

Apart from data conversion, MEK needs to make additional efforts to digitise its collection. As of October 2021, only 14,115 objects from the MEK collection, a small subset of the 130,000 objects that have entries created

in the MDS, are presented in the centralised online catalogue SMB-digital. According to Prof. Elisabeth Tietmeyer, the museum’s director, one reason is that an object entry must have a good description and a good photograph to be published in SMB-digital. This internal rule was implemented to ensure a minimum level of data completeness and consistency across all SMB’s collections. The usability of the web platform was considered: the user could accurately view what they were looking for. Consider the representation of the same “Silesian wool quilt” object on SMB-digital (Figure 10.3).¹¹ In addition to basic information, this online entry allows the public to download a digital version of the object. The licensing agreement (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) mentioned at the top of the page permits sharing and remixing of artworks, but not their commercial use. The transition from older to newer



Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
Preußischer Kulturbesitz

RECHERCHE ≡

Sammlungen Online > Recherche > "Flecketeppich"

Suchergebnisse



Fotonachweis: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum Europäischer Kulturen / CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

"Flecketeppich"

1750 – 1800

Museum Europäischer Kulturen

Ident. Nr.: A (17 J 1) 133/1931

Kontakt und Feedback

Teilen:   

Datierung	1750 – 1800
Material / Technik	Tuchreste, aneinandergenäht, Feinzeichnung gestickt
Abmessungen	Länge x Breite: 155 x 155 cm
Geografische Bezüge	Gebrauchsort: Schlesien
Permalink	 https://id.smb.museum/object/501038

Objektbeschreibung

Wolle, vielfarbig; Stoffintarsie mit Stickerei in Seide; eingeteilt in neun quadratische Felder mit jeweils anderer Fondsfarbe, umlaufender Rand stahlblau mit roter Raute, unterbrochen von 8 Rundformen; Zwischenkanten dunkelblau und beige mit weißem Paspel; bildliche Darstellung: Das Leben Christi und Szenen, die sich auf den kommenden Christus und auf dessen Leben beziehen

Vermutlich Fastentuch; Darstellungen aus dem Passionszyklus und aus dem Alten Testament

Figure 10.3 “Silesian wool quilt” object entry on SMB-digital, © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, <https://id.smb.museum/object/501038/flecketeppich> (accessed 14 July 2024).

generations of systems necessitates a re-examination of mandatory fields and image requirements aligned with contemporary practices of knowledge dissemination.

The Role of Imperfect Tools

To accommodate the varied needs of museums within the SMB network, a group of experts from various curatorial fields define and set the standards for cataloguing and documentation. These “standards” might not be sufficient for each and every requirement at every institution. In line with these standards, certain strands of technical knowledge have been exhaustively documented and communicated through written protocols. An MEK museologist can decipher the category number “35 F 1” for an object by consulting the cataloguing manual “Systematik-Katalog” (Museum of European Cultures 2014), which contains a list of 74 broad subject headings and their associated terms. This manual represents historically grown norms of object cataloguing at the institution. However, the inventory number in Figure 10.1 is more difficult to decode because it refers to a method of cataloguing that is no longer used at MEK and which is applicable to a small number of objects, some of which were lost during World War II. This inventory number reflects implicit technical knowledge, as few staff members can explain the meaning of a string of characters such as “III.d. 175 L.” In other words, it is a piece of know-how that spreads unnoticed across select museum institutions (in this case, MEK and its predecessors, the Museum of German Folklore, and the Ethnological Museum).

A digital catalogue entry in an MDS contains fewer pieces of unwritten knowledge accessible only to a group of insiders than an index card. The dashboard view of the MDS software allows for a high level of intertextuality. A data field in an object’s entry can be linked to another or to a broader view of the institutions or individuals associated with that data field. In traditional museum work environments, this type of linking would entail museum personnel moving from room to room and perusing various catalogues. Furthermore, this intertextual feature allows a digital catalogue to convey an organisation’s tacit knowledge more efficiently, which is the know-how embodied in the institution that is required to follow formal and informal rules but is not explicitly stated (Collins 2010, 2012) without transforming this knowledge. This tacit knowledge can be transferred asynchronously between team members due to the modular structure and interface technology of any modern MDS, which facilitate data exchange with other users and applications.

When we compare the SMB-digital view of the “Silesian wool quilt” (Figure 10.3) to the MDS view (Figure 10.2) and index-card view (Figure 10.1), we notice that the two subsequent systems display the object’s identification number (“A (17 J 1) 133/1931”) rather than a category number (“17 j 1”) and inventory number (“133/31”) as their index-card predecessor did.

The display of these two numbers is no longer desirable for a digital tool, as it reduces the usability and interoperability of the system. Although it is assigned to the sub-group “17 j” for wall hangings (“Wandbehänge”), the “Silesian wool quilt” is a hybrid of wall hangings and carpets and could have been assigned to the sub-group “17 k” for carpets (“Teppiche”). The complicated category systems at MEK, which were introduced during the era of index cards (the 1930s) and were long taken for granted, have become inhospitable to complex forms of artwork and new generations of digital objects and digitised material (Tran 2021).

The index cards and MDS-based catalogue entries are examples of imperfect or incomplete tools that are needed for the refinement of operations and skills. Regular exposure to these tools helped the museum employees hone their skills. Conventional museum knowledge systems such as index cards and registration books resemble what Sennett (2008) refers to as “imperfect tools” with their own virtues: they provide an alternative and suggest how something could be done better.¹² Incomplete index cards and digital catalogue entries left enough reflection space for museum staff—not necessarily documentalists or indexers but any employee who has contact with collection objects. The mishandling of object data, as discussed in the cases of index cards and MDS, illustrates structural dysfunctions or local work practices that fail to ripen and can lead to staff disengagement. Making complete and consistent object data is therefore a continuous and strenuous craft that necessitates a constant reflection on the part of the staff.

Standardised tools, such as the index cards depicted in Figure 10.1, enable museum employees to gain instructive experience by working through hundreds of catalogue records. Meanwhile, scholars studying infrastructure have pointed out that any method of organising object information can be a standard for one community of practice and an annoyance or misfit for another. Regardless of how perplexing these standardised tools appear, they have design implications for succeeding tools and systems (Slota and Bowker 2017; Bowker 2018). The shortcomings of index card and MDS-based systems would later inform the representation of objects in SMB-digital, a centralised online catalogue of multiple institutional members. The SMB-digital platform crystallised as a condensed representation of the previous solutions’ shared features as well as the result of ongoing repair and maintenance efforts by diverse types of museum staff. The weight of standards and conventions, as addressed in the earlier sections, is an example of ongoing craftwork, as new “apprentices” learn to do things correctly. This learning process is ongoing because, as the new systems are incorporated into the existing infrastructure, the MDS and SMB-digital must trade-off some desirable features (usability, scalability) for undesirable ones (sophisticated inventory/category systems) and make potential improvements.

Conclusions

This chapter examines the infrastructural qualities of collections management, relying on the premise that infrastructures—as an organic unfolding within an existing environment—could be “grown” rather than “built.” By eliciting nuances and context regarding how staff realise and perceive their everyday routines, roles, and associated responsibilities, the study seeks to deconstruct the infrastructural backbone of collections management activities. Knowledge creation is embedded in every phase of museum memory-making. It starts from the moment the institution chooses which part of its collection is to be shown. The institution then represents the memory object in a platform of its choice, narrated by its guide, making the object accessible and shareable on its own terms. This study traces the development of object representation at the Museum Europäischer Kulturen, recognising it as the substrate upon which knowledge production activities are growing. The author demonstrates how index cards in the 1930s necessitated the multifunctionality of the e-catalogue system MuseumPlus Classic and then its cloud-based successor MuseumPlus RIA, which placed a premium on automation and operational effectiveness. E-catalogue object entries informed the interface and interoperability of SMB-digital, a centralised digital catalogue. Both MuseumPlus RIA and SMB-digital marked the transition from serving users in physical locations to serving digital users. Although technical solutions were far from perfect, staff were able to continuously enhance each tool to maintain the informational fabric of the institution.

The chapter points out the two facets of collections management that can either restrict or enable documentation practices consistent with emerging modes of openness. The first facet is that staff members who do essential but informal tasks are decoupled from dominant organisational actors. The analysis of MEK demonstrates that, as staff members navigate existing and frequently taken-for-granted object management practices and predefined procedures, they acquire new skills and habits that assist them in coping with ambiguity and uncertainty. The second facet is about documentation work as a set of engineered activities that are purposefully crafted. Embedded in a staff's everyday practices, documentation work employs various data structures, content, and exchange standards. It constitutes ongoing reflection and tinkering, repair and maintenance that arise from the imperfect tools. This emphasis on the peripheral actors, both human (staff taking care of object information) and non-human (cataloguing tools), compels us to consider the due attention to everyday work in collections management. The craftwork of continuing and rigorous maintenance of cataloguing tools enables each line of work within the museum to improve its day-to-day workflow through ongoing peer exchange and self-reflection. It is therefore necessary to maintain the infrastructural backbone of collections management by giving due consideration to the peripheral actors in order for the infrastructure to scale beyond the local, one-site practice.

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Notes

- 1 Contemporary works of art that incorporate audio, video, film, slide, or computer technologies can be referred to as time-based media art whenever they have duration as a dimension and reveal themselves to the viewer over time. Each iteration is thus made up of a unique original and only exists when it is installed. See Laurenson (2013), van Saaze, Wharton & Reisman (2018), and the Media Conservation Lab's entry on 'time-based media,' www.guggenheim.org/conservation/time-based-media.
- 2 www.poem-horizon.eu/.
- 3 RIA stands for Rich Internet Architecture. MuseumPlus RIA is a cloud-based version of the MuseumPlus software that can facilitate Web services-based integration with bar-coding, digital asset management, and other systems. Due to its user friendliness, external hosting capacity, and location-independent data accessibility over MuseumPlus Classic, the RIA version has gained popularity in the German museum sector.
- 4 Six semi-structured interviews with SMB staff were conducted—one via Skype and five in person in Berlin. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and subsequently coded according to grounded theory principles.
- 5 www.smb-digital.de.
- 6 Anonymised name.
- 7 The line between know-how and tacit knowledge in cultural heritage is more blurred than in the context of scientific experiments. I use these two notions borrowing Michael Lynch's analysis (1985) of tacit knowledge as something "taken for granted," and the fact that it plays a significant role in the conscious evaluation of everyday work without the shop floor workers paying notice. For in-depth discussions on types of scientific knowledge (public knowledge, tacit knowledge, and local knowledge/know-how), see Knorr-Cetina (1981), Cambrosio and Keating (1988), and Collins (2012).
- 8 Anonymised name.
- 9 For more on the institution's history from 1873, when the Museum of Folklore was founded, until 1992, when the two folklore museums in East and West Berlin were reunited, see www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/museum-europa-eischer-kulturen/about-us/history/.
- 10 The first catalogued objects of the early Museum of German Folklore (which resembled those of the Ethnological Museum) used this system; later, the Museum of German Folklore changed the whole system, whereas the Ethnological Museum (with its Department Europe) continued its geographical documentation.
- 11 <https://id.smb.museum/object/501038/fleckelteppich>.
- 12 Addressing the processual and generative aspects of skilled practice, Sennett (2008) uses an example from Voltaire's *Encyclopedia* to argue that hand-made glass, with its irregularities and distinctiveness, influenced the development and refinement of glassblowing techniques.

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